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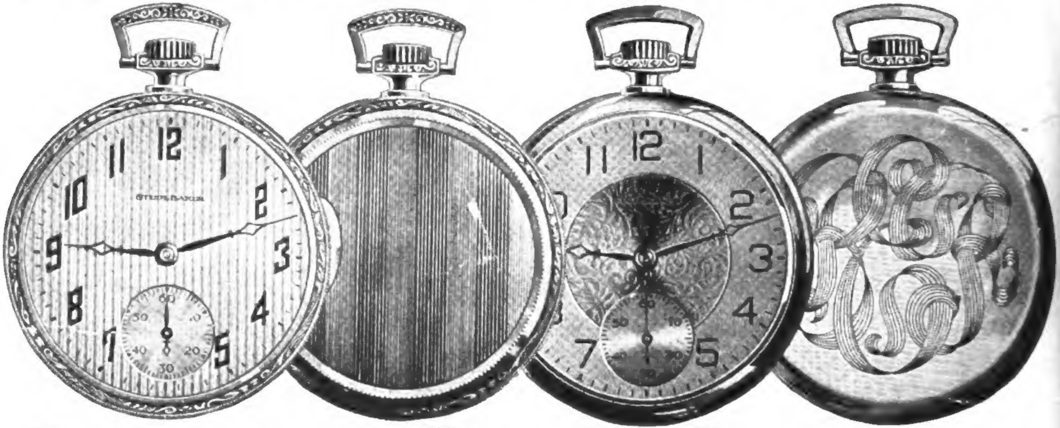

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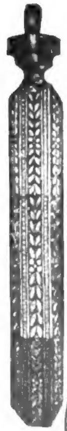

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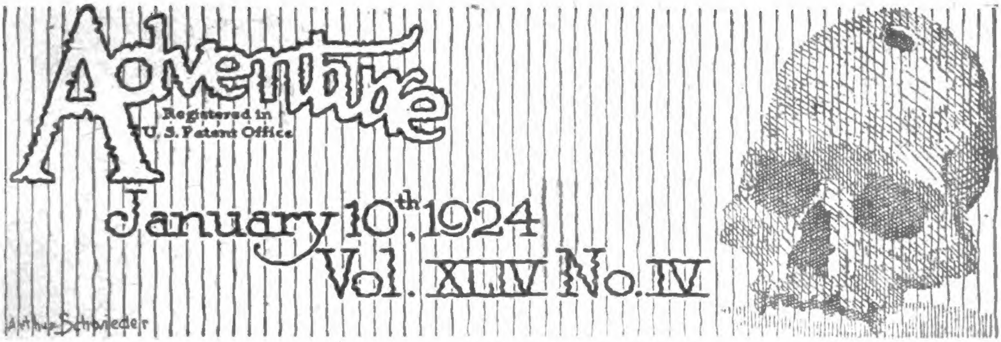

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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Cover Design . . . . **William Liepse**

Four Complete Novelettes

BULL KELLY had always sworn to get *Hard Hart—El Tigre* his men called him. The two men meet again in the steaming heat of the Brazilian jungle, where they sought refuge from the penalty of outraged law in their own country. "THICKER THAN WATER," a complete novelette, by Arthur O. Friel in the next issue, tells how *Bull* made good his threat.

INTO the far North *Swain* pursues *Olvir Rosta*, confident that vengeance will at last be exacted. To the warnings of his companions *Swain* repeats the saying that has grown about their enmity: "*Olvir Rosta* living will never be the death of Swain." But the magic of *Olvir's* grandmother, *Frakork* the witch, survives her burned body, and strange things happen before the bloody sun sets on victory. "SWAIN'S END," a complete novelette by Arthur D. Howden Smith in the next issue.

AS THEY tramped mile after mile into the conquered country where rations were scarce and tobacco scarcer, these doughboys began to realize that the Armistice had brought no end to the hardships of war. When the realization of this drove two of them to take the matters into their own hands they discovered that neither had it brought an end to hazards and high adventures. "HIKE'S END," by Harold Golder, is a novelette of the War complete in the next issue.

TOM REAGAN, Government agent, was sent to New Orleans to clean up the rum-runners and put a halt on illegal importations from Havana. *Reagan's* mind was not so narrow as to keep out other things, however. There was the matter of the Chinese ring, as well as the operations of *Tauscher*, for one thing—and in the background the sinister figure of *Hom Fang the Scar-Face*. "BELOW THE SURFACE," a complete novelette by Garrard Harris in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

***Adventure* is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

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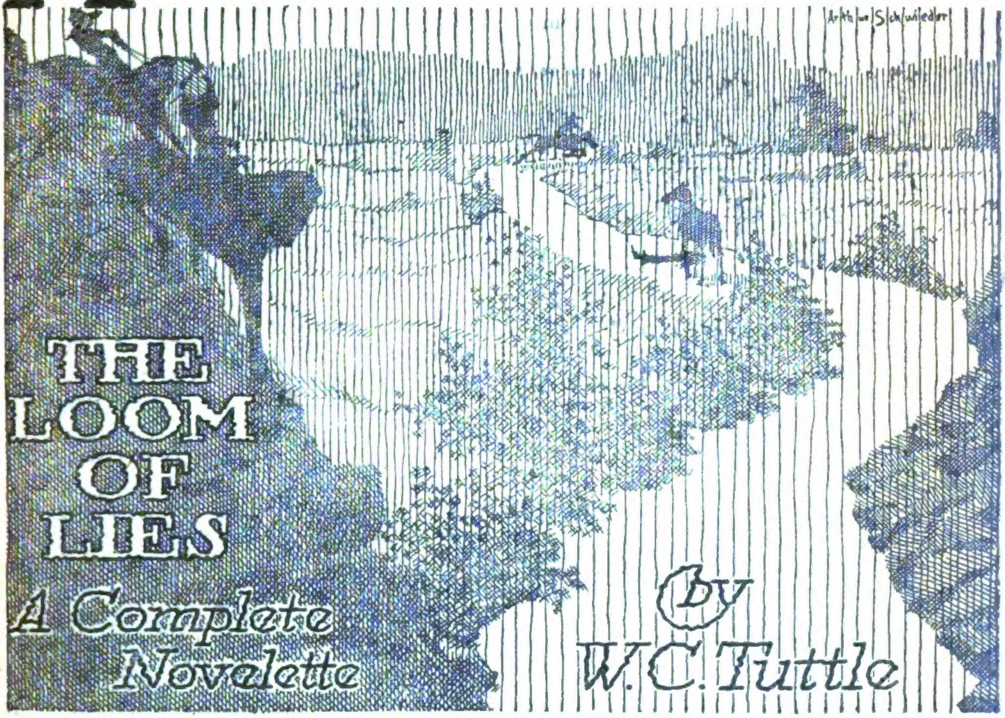

THE LOOM OF LIES

A Complete Novelette

by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "According to Ng Loy," "Blind Trails," etc.

IT WAS an August evening in the valley of the Bunch Grass, and in a year so dry that the poplars and cottonwoods along the Lost Horse River had already turned yellow, and the leaves of the willows were a crackling carpet to the tread of thirsty stock.

No rain had come to the valley since the last Chinook winds had swept the Winter snows, and the river was merely a shallow watercourse of evil-smelling fluid. The rolling hills, which extended back to the encircling mountains, were as brown as burlap, and the range cattle were dusty of hide, thin of flank and red-eyed from the heat.

At the north end of this valley, its boundaries extending to the encircling cliffs, through which came the road out of Blackfeet Pass, was the JHF ranch, owned by John H. Fann, known throughout the valley as "John the Baptist." This was not because of any religious proclivities, but because of his enormous size, his great white beard, which swept almost to his waist, and his massive head of white hair, hanging to his shoulders.

Just now John Fann sat on the broad steps of the JHF ranch house, a rambling, unpainted structure, his elbows on his knees and his hands concealed under his great beard. He might well have posed for Rodin's "The Thinker," although there was a trifle more of sorrow than of thought in his half-closed eyes.

Behind him, leaning against one of the porch posts, stood "Ma" Fann, a thin, sad-faced little woman, with large, brown eyes, and a wisp of colorless hair, drawn tightly back and knotted in what was commonly known as a "pug." She was looking off across the seemingly endless hills, which had lost their drab hues of day and were painted in ivory and lavender in the glow of the setting sun.

But Ma Fann's eyes and expression did

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not register that she was viewing the beauties of the painted hills. She had seen them many times in the last fifteen years. Perhaps she had marveled at the Master Artist's handiwork at some remote time, but that time was long forgotten.

Just out in front of the steps was Bob Kern, squatted on the heels of his boots, as he drew meaningless patterns in the dust with a piece of willow-branch. He was a thin-waisted cowboy, with a face as thin and bony as the face of a half-starved Indian. His nose had been broken and grew at a peculiar angle, and one eye was not exactly set in a straight focus, but his thin-lipped mouth was full of good teeth.

Bob Kern lifted his thin face and squinted narrowly at John Fann. He looked down at the dust-patterns and cleared his throat softly.

" 'T's all right, John—'f yuh look at it thataway. It ain't noways my point of view. Rustlin' 's rustlin', and it don't make no difference whether it's me 'r you or the King of Siam—it's still rustlin'."

"Yes, it's still rustlin'," said John Fann softly. "Men will always steal, I suppose. Sometimes I wonder why, Bob."

"Why?" Bob Kern squinted closely, and then looked up at Ma Fann, "Will yuh go inside the house, Ma? I've gotta swear a few notes."

Ma Fann smiled wistfully.

"Swearing doesn't help, Bob."

"Mebbe not you, Ma—but it does me. It makes me so —— mad, I tell yuh. Here they've been stealin' JHF cattle for a year, until—" Bob Kern spread his hands wearily —"Honest, Ma, we ain't got enough left t' wad a shot-gun."

"Is it as bad as that, Bob?"

"Wel-l-ll," drawled Bob, "mebbe it ain't quite that bad, Ma, but it sure is gittin' serious. Another year at this rate and there won't be a JHF cow on the Bunch Grass range."

A rider was coming down one of the angling trails toward the main gate, riding slowly. He dismounted and opened the gate, which creaked dismally. Somewhere a cow bawled softly. The gate creaked shut and the man started toward the corral, leading his horse. The man was short and fat, with the waddling walk of a duck.

" 'Splinter's' likely hungry, Ma," observed John Fann.

"He mostly always is," said Ma Fann, "I'll put the biscuits in the oven."

She turned and went slowly into the house. Bob yawned and sat down on the lower step, where he humped over and rolled a cigaret. In a few minutes, "Splinter" Martin waddled up from the corral. He sat down heavily beside Bob and helped himself to Bob's tobacco.

"I run across 'Chet' Gunning t'day," said Splinter hoarsely. Splinter always talked as if suffering from a severe cold.

"Thasso?" Bob showed little interest

"Over by Singin' Angel Flats," explained Splinter. "Me and him had a little talk."

"Yuh would," nodded Bob. "Chet ain't none secretive."

"I reckon he's right, at that," grunted Splinter. " 'F I was the sheriff I'd 'a' found it out long before this."

"Oh, yuh would, would yuh?" exploded Bob. "I s'pose you knowed it all the time, didn't yuh? Now, that's fine of yuh, Splint."

"F'r gosh sake, what ails you?" croaked Splinter. "You don't need t' ride me, cowboy. Right's right and don't wrong nobody."

"Don't quarrel," advised John Fann softly. "That does not mend matters, boys. Splinter, you better wash up for supper."

Splinter got up slowly and started for the rear of the house.

"And don't forget that you've got two ears and a back to yore neck," added Bob.

Splinter stopped.

"Zasso? Huh!"

He waddled back, grasped Bob by the ears and looked him over closely.

"Well, well! I sure admire yuh, Robert Emmett Kern. I admires any man who makes a discovery and immediate and soon passes out his information to his friends. You ranks with some of our great discoverers, cowboy; but I'd say you was jist a little more rank, at times."

"Supper is ready, boys," said Ma Fann from the doorway. "Have you washed, Splinter?"

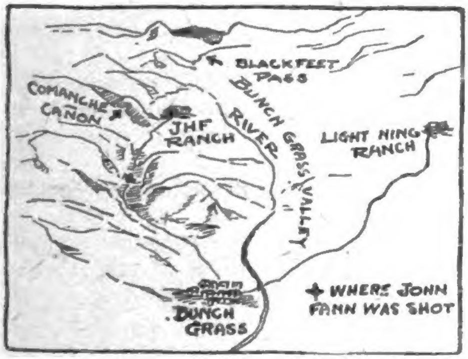
"No, ma'am—" quickly—"but I've had a lesson in it. Be right with yuh, even if I dislocate m' shoulders."

Splinter went to the rear of the kitchen, placed the battered wash-basin on a bench and poured some water from a five-gallon kerosene can, which had been fitted with a bail. Noisily he washed his face and dried it on a coarse towel.

He could hear Ma Fann singing softly as she placed the supper on the table. It was an old church hymn, sung off-key, as if the singer's mind was far from in tune. Splinter listened, his eyes half-closed, the rough towel held tightly in his two hands. He heard John Fann and Bob Kern clump into the dining-room, the closing of the oven door, as Ma Fann removed the biscuits. He picked up the wash-basin and slowly poured out the soapy water.

"Gawd A'mighty made them two," he said softly, meaning John and Ma Fann. "He made 'em t' look kinda like me and the rest of the folks, but He must 'a' took special pains, I reckon, 'cause they've got somethin'—that—we—ain't—got."

He hung the battered wash-basin on the wall, picked up his hat and went in through the kitchen door. Ma Fann was standing at the stove, looking down at a pan of brown-topped biscuits, holding a plate in her hand. Splinter stepped in beside her and she looked up at him. Quickly she glanced toward the door which led into the dining-room, and then her hand darted inside her waist and she handed Splinter a small kodak picture.



It showed two little children, little chubby things, sitting on the ground, looking up like two little robins at the approach of the mother bird. Splinter's face broke into a smile and he glanced at Ma Fann. Tears were running down her cheeks, but her lips were drawn in a hard line.

Splinter cleared his throat softly, gave her back the little picture and patted her clumsily on the shoulder as he went into the dining-room.

"He must 'a' washed his ears," stated Bob loudly. "Look at the danged pelican. Whatcha doing—cryin', Splinter? You've got tears in yore beautiful eyes, angel child."

"Soap!" grunted Splinter, easing himself into a chair. "I'm gittin' so danged clean that I wash m' eyeballs. Got a good notion t' build a bath-tub, so we could take a good washin' every month or so."

"My gosh, yuh don't need to go to extremes!" exclaimed Bob. "Just because yuh washed yore neck and ears once, don't go and get a lot of dudish notions."

THERE was little more said during supper. Splinter, who usually carried the bulk of the conversation, was silent and thoughtful.

He and Bob Kern had been working for the JHF outfit for nearly three years, and they knew the inside life of most of the Bunch Grass range folk. There had been another cowboy working there when they came; a wild-riding, hard-drinking, handsome young man, whose name was Barr Wyeth. He was a good cow-hand, but he did not seem to fit in at the JHF.

And then there had been Nell Fann, the daughter, a dark-haired, dark-eyed, strong-willed girl of nineteen. And she had fallen in love with Bob Kern. But Bob Kern did not have the broken nose and the one unreliable eye at that time. That was a memento of a broken cinch and an outlaw horse.

John and Ma Fann had smiled upon the engagement. They both swore by Bob Kern, and John Fann had made his plans to turn the management of the ranch over to Bob Kern. But when Bob had recovered from his accident—he was not the same Bob Kern, outwardly. And who can say that any maid of nineteen will believe that beauty is only skin deep?

Barr Wyeth was undeniably handsome. Range rumor linked his name with Nell Fann, and John Fann had foolishly taken her to task for it. And John Fann lost. A recital of Barr Wyeth's failings only seemed to enhance his few virtues to her, and inside of a week they had eloped.

Never by word nor deed had either John nor Ma Fann showed that they were broken-hearted over the match, but Nell had never come home—never had seen her father and mother, except at a distance, possibly. But fortune smiled upon Barr

Wyeth. With the last few dollars he owned he won a small stake at poker. Then he recklessly plunged into roulette until his winnings went well into thousands. At midnight that night the gambling house of Buck Kelly at Bunch Grass, known as the Buck-Horn, closed its games and announced that the house was broke.

Barr Wyeth had cleaned them out. With his winning he had bought the Lightning ranch and brand and set himself up as a stock-man. The Lightning ranch-house was located twelve miles from the JHF, and seven miles from the town of Bunch Grass.

Barr Wyeth drank considerable and gambled at every opportunity, but fortune only smiled upon him once. He hired two wild-riding cowpunchers, Mark Ells and "Windy" Hart, whose monthly earnings went to swell the exchequer of the several drink emporiums in Bunch Grass, or to those who engineered the destinies of green-covered tables.

Many times had Barr Wyeth and John Fann met, but never did they speak nor recognize each other in any way. Barr sneered at the mention of John the Baptist, but the name of Barr Wyeth apparently meant nothing to John Fann.

Then the JHF cattle began to disappear; began to dribble away. Bob and Splinter had noticed it first and had told John Fann about it. He was unconvinced, but after a few months he began to realize that unless something was done the JFH brand would only remain on the iron itself.

Bob Kern had found the first clue—the track of a horse wearing a bar-shoe. This horse had been used in the roping of a calf. There was the remains of a small branding fire. There was nothing to show that it was a JHF calf, but honest cattlemen are not in the habit of roping and branding calves far out in the open range.

Bob had given his information to Splinter, and inside of a week they had discovered the owner of that horse. It was Bob who had discovered the horse and he had sworn Splinter to secrecy.

Then Splinter had found a yearling heifer wearing a blotted brand on the right hip, while on the other hip was the jagged streak of the Lightning brand, which had been burned on with a running-iron. The other brand had been blotted entirely, but the blot was on the exact spot of the JHF registry.

Again Bob swore Splinter to secrecy. There was still no absolute evidence. A week later, Splinter found the evidence of another range branding, and near the fire he found a hand-made bone hondo, on which had been burned the initials B.W. A small piece of frayed rope attached to the hondo showed that the weakened rope had broken and the hondo been lost.

And with this evidence, Bob Kern had gone to John and Ma Fann. Splinter had asked him to do it while he—Splinter—was not there. It had been hard for Bob to do this. Down deep in his heart he still loved Nell Wyeth, and little less was his love for John the Baptist and Ma Fann, who was "Ma" to every cowpuncher the length and breadth of the valley.

Neither of the old folks had expressed an opinion. He had simply stated his evidence and they knew that he would not lie. Their daughter's husband was robbing them—had been robbing them for nearly a year.

"That is the evidence," said Bob. "Shall I report it to the sheriff?"

"No," said John Fann. "This shall be our secret, Bob."

And that was why Bob Kern had said—"Rustlin' is rustlin', and it don't make no difference whether it's me, or you, or the King of Siam—it's still rustlin'."

After supper was over Bob and Splinter went to the bunk-house.

"You told 'em, didn't yuh?" queried Splinter, as he removed his boots.

"Yeah." Bob nodded slowly. "I told 'em, Splinter."

"Did John get sore?"

"Like he always does. It must 'a' hurt 'em both like ——, Splinter. They didn't say nothin'. Ma just kinda took hold of a post with both hands, but John didn't do nothin' but look off across the hills. I don't reckon they was thinkin' much about Barr Wyeth."

Splinter shook his head.

"No-o-o, I don't reckon they was, Bob. Ma showed me a picture of Nell's twins."

"I seen it. 'Pastry' Pell swiped it at the Lightnin' and brought it to her."

Pastry Pell was sort of a lazy cowboy who worked extra at the different ranches, and had a habit of mixing in every one's business.

"Goin' t' tell the sheriff, Bob?"

"Not if John has his way about it. He

don't want anybody t' know, but—aw —— Splinter, suppose we was in his place?"

"A rustler's a rustler, Bob," reminded Splinter.

"Jist what I got through tellin' him. But he won't do anythin'. I reckon the Lightnin' can rustle every JHF cow on the Bunch Grass hills and John the Baptist won't say a word, on Nell's account."

"That's right," agreed Splinter, and then dolefully, "I—I wonder if I talked too much t'day. Dawg-gone it, I met Chet Gunning and me and him talked quite a little.

"He asked me how things was comin' along, and I told him we'd likely last six months longer. Kind of a fool remark t' make, and he asks me what I meant; so I told him that somebody was liftin' JHF cows.

"He wanted t' know how long this had been goin' on and I told him. He got kinda mad and wanted t' know why John the Baptist hadn't told him. Then—" Splinter threw down his cigaret and ground out the lighted end with the heel of his boot—"Then I told him about the yearlin' with the vented brand and the Lightnin' put on with a runnin'-iron."

"Uh-huh," said Bob slowly, thoughtfully. "You told him about all there was t' know, didn't yuh, Splinter?"

"Well, I never stopped t' think how John would take it. I might 'a' knowed I s'pose. Yuh don't reckon Chet will start anythin' on what I told him, do yuh, Bob?"

"There's an election in November," said Bob meaningly, and then, "What did Chet say?"

"He said it wasn't givin' a sheriff a square deal to keep things quiet thataway. I told him he better talk it over with John, bein' as it's John's cows. We had quite an argument, and he said he'd come out and talk with John."

Bob yawned wearily and leaned back on his bunk. He was sorry that Splinter had talked with Chet Gunning. Chet had never been friendly to Barr Wyeth, and Bob knew that right now Barr Wyeth was working against Gunning in the coming campaign.

Gunning was a man of about forty years of age, tall, dark, hawk-faced and with a drooping, black mustache. He was known as a good shot, fast on the draw and tireless in the saddle. Gunning was not a good "mixer," and many expressed surprize that he had been elected.

He was a single man and "batched" alone in a little shack at the outskirts of Bunch Grass. Even his deputy, the genial, roly-poly Andy Allard, had to confess that he had never become well acquainted with the sheriff. But Gunning was efficient, ambitious and had made a good officer.

And Bob Kern knew that Gunning would make trouble for Barr Wyeth. Not that Wyeth did not have it coming to him, but Bob hated to be mixed up in it, because it might look like he was working against the man who had married his sweetheart.

IT WAS the following morning, just after breakfast, when Chet Gunning rode up to the porch of the JHF ranch-house and dismounted. John Fann had watched his coming from within the house, but now he came out on the porch and greeted the sheriff.

Splinter was down at the corral, but Bob had stayed at the breakfast-table talking to Ma Fann. Bob heard John's greeting to the sheriff; so he picked up his hat and went to the front door. Gunning was leaning against the side of the porch, talking to John Fann about the interminable drouth when Bob came out.

"Howdy, Chet," greeted Bob, "how's crime?"

"Well—" the sheriff brushed some tobacco flakes off his shirt-front and half-smiled—"it appears to be doin' real well, Kern—if what I hear has any truth in it."

John Fann glanced quickly at Bob, as if wondering who had told the sheriff, but Bob was calmly rolling a cigaret.

"Accordin' to what I hear, there ain't no mystery about it," remarked the sheriff slowly, "but I thought I'd have a little talk with John Fann before I went ahead on the case."

"I never was good at riddles, sheriff," said John Fann, "so you had better speak plainly."

"Riddles?" The sheriff lifted his eyebrows, "I reckon you know what I mean, John. Seems to me that the Lightnin' has struck in the same place more than once."

"You're doing the talking," reminded John coldly.

"I sure am," replied the sheriff, just a trifle nettled. "I reckon it's time for me to do a little talkin', don'tcha think?"

"Perhaps I might answer that, if I knew what you mean, sheriff."

"Aw, ——!" exploded Gunning. "You've had a lot of cattle stolen and you've got enough evidence to send a certain party to the penitentiary, haven't yuh?"

"Have I?" John Fann seemed mildly surprized.

"Have yuh?" Gunning's eyes snapped. "Well, haven't yuh?"

"Did you come out here to find out if I have, or to tell me that I have?"

"Well, ——!" Chet Gunning seemed at a loss to know what to say. "Now, look here, John Fann. I reckon you're tryin' to shield Barr Wyeth, but I'm —— if the law don't take it up in spite of you. Mebbe you don't care if the Lightnin' steals yuh blind, but crime is crime, and I'm goin' to stop it; *sabe?*"

"Since when did the law hire you to ride herd on the JHF stock?" queried Bob Kern easily, as he came down the steps and stopped near the sheriff.

"About the same time that it gave you the right to horn in on a conversation that don't concern yuh," retorted the sheriff sarcastically.

Bob grinned widely.

"Then I reckon we're both talkin' foolish, Gunning. Suppose you go back and run yore office, while we runs the JHF, and mebbe we'll all do well."

"Thasso?"

Gunning squinted critically at Bob. He knew that Bob would fight with fists or guns, and that he was fairly adept with either. Gunning was not looking for a fight; so he ignored Bob and turned to John Fann.

"I reckon I'll just go ahead on what evidence I've got, John."

"What evidence have you got?" queried John.

The sheriff hitched up his belt and looked around. Splinter was coming up from the corral and the sheriff greeted him warmly.

"Hello, Martin. I was just checkin' up on some of the things you told me yesterday about the rustlin' of the JHF stock. I reckon you had the right idea."

Splinter flushed slightly and looked at Bob, who was looking straight at him. Splinter spat thoughtfully and knitted his brows.

"The things I told yuh, sheriff?" Splinter's brow smoothed and he grinned widely. "I reckon yore dreamin', ain't yuh? Yesterday? Why, I ain't seen yuh for a week."

Gunning stared at him for a moment and then walked over to his horse. He looked coldly at John Fann and Bob Kern and seemed about to speak, but mounted his horse and rode stiffly down through the big gate and headed down the road toward Bunch Grass.

EVERY city, every town and every community has its one certain eccentric character, and Pastry Pell was the one which fate had dealt to Bunch Grass. He was thin, almost to the point of emaciation, pasty of face, colorless of eye and with protruding teeth, as yellow as dirty ivory.

His garb was as drab as his physique and personality; yet he was a good cow-hand—when he would work, which was not often. He preferred to meander about the range, eating here, sleeping there; tolerated, but never welcome. He was unable to read or write, yet he had an uncanny nose for news or scandal—preferably, scandal. He owned his own horse, saddle and bridle, and carried his six-shooter shoved inside the waistband of his trousers, where, on account of his lack of avoirdupois, it hung precariously, threatening at any time to become an inhabitant of the aforementioned trousers.

But a gun was of little use to Pastry, if you were willing to take Pastry's own words for it. He had hired out to the Double-Triangle at round-up time, and the foreman had asked him about his outfit.

"I've got a bronc and a saddle and a bridle and a six-gun—the —— thing."

"What's the matter with the gun? Ain't it no good?" queried the boss.

"Yeah, it's a good gun," admitted Pastry. "It's a —— good gun, but what the —— good is it? I never see nothin' to shoot."

And it was Pastry Pell that Sheriff Chet Gunning met, as he dismounted in front of his office in Bunch Grass. Pastry made it a point to visit the office at irregular times, because he might hear something to tell others about.

Sheriff Gunning knew Pastry very well. Also, Sheriff Gunning was in a bad frame of mind, following his interview with the three men at the JHF ranch. He knew there was nothing he could do, as long as John Fann refused to admit theft. Splinter's denial of their previous conversation made the sheriff boil.

"Huh! You ain't eatin' right, sheriff," was Pastry's opening comment.

"What's that?"

The sheriff turned from tying his horse and stared at Pastry.

"Stummick's disorderly, that's what she is," declared Pastry with conviction. "You ought to quit eatin' meat f'r a while and stick to vegi-tables."

"Now, what in —— are you talkin' about?" demanded the sheriff.

"Jowls kinda yaller," explained Pastry. "Eyes blood-shot. Yore either sufferin' from bad circ-lation, torpid liver, or—" Pastry considered the sheriff closely—"somebody done somethin' to git under yore skin."

"Mm-m-yah!" snorted the sheriff and went into the office.

After a moment, which Pastry consumed in masticating a huge chew of tobacco, he followed the sheriff inside.

The sheriff had seated himself at his desk and began sorting some legal papers, but now he looked up, a scowl on his face. But Pastry ignored the scowl and sat down against the wall, while the sheriff considered him for a space of time.

"Know who rides a horse that wears a bar-shoe?" asked the sheriff.

"Bar-shoe?" Pastry expectorated toward the door and nodded quickly. "Barr Wyeth."

"Hm-m-m!"

The sheriff squinted closely at Pastry for a moment and went back to examining his papers.

"Why?" queried Pastry. The question had excited his natural curiosity. "What about a bar-shoe?"

The sheriff considered his answer well before he said—

"There's a lot of JHF stock missin'."

"Yeah?"

Pastry got slowly to his feet and leaned against the wall.

"And what about the bar-shoe?"

The sheriff leaned back in his chair and considered the ceiling for several moments.

"There's a yearlin' somewhere in the hills, wearin' a vented brand on the right hip, and on the other hip is a Lightnin' mark, run on with an iron rod."

"Well, f'r gosh sake!" exploded Pastry. "Does John the Baptist know it?"

"Yeah, he knows it."

"Huh!"

Pastry's thin face seemed to twist with eagerness. This surely was a choice morsel; something worth the telling, and it would surely be told with elaborations and variations.

"Hot, ain't it?" grunted Pastry, moving toward the door. "I ain't never seen it so hot, 'cept in Death Valley, and I ain't never been there. Hope we have a rain."

"Be a long dry spell, if we don't," remarked the sheriff, but his sarcastic reply did not quite reach Pastry Pell, who was already hurrying to the hitch-rack in front of the Buck Horn saloon.

For a long time the sheriff stared down at the mass of papers in front of him, a calculating look on his face. He knew that John Fann would not prosecute Barr Wyeth, on account of Barr's wife, and he wondered what Barr Wyeth would do when he found himself branded publicly as a cattle-rustler.

PASTRY lost no time in going to the Lightning ranch; in fact, his horse was a-lather when he swung off at the ranch-house and clumped loudly up the rickety steps. Mrs. Wyeth met him at the door, and even in his excitement, Pastry could see that she had been crying.

She stepped aside to let him in. In the next room a baby was crying fretfully. The room was poorly furnished, but clean as wax. The walls were hung with cheap crayon enlargements of the Wyeth ancestors, but there were no likenesses of any of the Fann family. An old upright organ stood in one corner, with oil lamps surmounting the brackets on each side.

"Where's Barr?" asked Pastry hoarsely.

"He—he's asleep," faltered Mrs. Wyeth, half-indicating a closed door with a jerk of her head.

Pastry knew that Barr Wyeth had spent most of the night at a roulette table in the Buck Horn and had consumed quantities of liquor.

"What did you want of him?" queried Mrs. Wyeth anxiously.

Pastry fidgeted. He wanted to talk to Barr Wyeth, but not in the humor that he would probably find him now; so he decided against waking him up to receive the news.

"I jist wanted t' tell him t' look out for the sheriff," said Pastry nervously.

Mrs. Wyeth's face went white. She

knew that Barr had come home drunk—what had he done that he should look out for the sheriff?

"What is it, Pastry?" she breathed the question. "What has he done?"

Neither of them saw Barr Wyeth's door open several inches.

"I got this from the sheriff," said Pastry slowly, "and I dunno what he's goin' t' do, but it kinda looks like Barr has been stealin' cows from the JHF."

"From the JHF?"

Mrs. Wyeth shut her eyes tightly, as if trying to blot out the thought.

"Yes, ma'am. Seems that there's a horse that wears a bar-shoe mixed up in it, and yore husband rides a horse that's shod thataway. And then there's a yearlin' that's had the JHF blotted and a lightnin' has been burned on with a runnin'-iron."

Mrs. Wyeth clutched the top of the table with both hands and stared at Pastry.

"Are you—sure—of—this?" she panted.

"That's what the sheriff said," nodded Pastry. "I asks him if John the Baptist knows about it and he said that he did."

The door behind them creaked warningly and Barr Wyeth came toward them. His eyes were blood-shot and his tousled hair hung down low over his forehead. He had only removed his boots, and his clothes were wrinkled and disarranged. Several days' growth of beard made Barr Wyeth anything but the handsome young man he had been a year before.

"Barr, you—" began Mrs. Wyeth, but he stopped her with an impatient motion of his hand and walked up close to Pastry.

"What's this stuff you've been tellin' her?" Barr's voice was half-angry, half-inquiring.

"Just what the sheriff told me," explained Pastry nervously. "He said——"

"That I was a rustler?" interrupted Barr.

"Yeah, and he said——"

"Drop that!" snapped Barr, grasping Pastry by the shoulder. "Did Chet Gunning tell you to come out here and tell this to my wife?"

"——, no! He never told me to tell it to anybody."

"But you found this out from him, didn't yuh?"

"Yeah, he—don't pinch me thataway! How's a feller goin' to talk with you pinchin' off his arm? He said that there was a yearlin' with a vented brand and that the Lightnin' had been run on with——"

Barr had drawn slightly away, after he had released Pastry's arm, and now he smashed the luckless Pastry full in the mouth with his clenched fist.

Pastry reeled backward, reaching blindly for support, while into him went Barr, smashing with both fists, driving Pastry out through the open door and knocking him backward off the porch, where he landed on his shoulders in a scraggly rosebush.

Barr halted at the edge of the porch, panting, cursing, while Mrs. Wyeth clung to his sleeve and begged him to stop. Barr shoved the hair out of his eyes and stared at her. He was berserk with rage and shoved her roughly aside as he went back into the house.

Pastry got wonderingly to his feet, dazed, bleeding. He had lost all sense of direction and his first two steps brought him in violent contact with the porch, after which he sat down real hard and held his face in his hands.

Mark Ellis and Windy Hart had seen the fight on the porch from down by the corral, and now they hurried up to the porch. Ellis was a stoop-shouldered, hard-faced young man with sagging lips and a flat nose. Windy Hart was a big man, narrow between the eyes, almost chinless and with a generous-sized nose, heavily veined in red.

They walked up and considered the fallen Pastry who managed to get to his feet. He sopped some of the gore off his face with the sleeve of his shirt and groaned whiningly. Mrs. Wyeth was still standing on the porch, one hand braced against a post.

"What's a matter, Pastry?" asked Windy curiously.

Pastry spat painfully and shook his head.

"Can'tcha talk?" queried Mark.

"Yeth," Pastry lisped from the loss of teeth.

"Tell us what was the matter, won'tcha?"

"No, thir," Pastry shook his head. "I ain't goin' t' thay nothin'. I—I—" Pastry glanced toward the open door of the ranch-house—"I thed too much ath it wath."

As Pastry turned toward his horse, Barr Wyeth came out of the house. He was dressed now, even to his belt and holster, and under one arm he was carrying a carbine in a scabbard.

He did not speak to his wife, but as he started past her she grasped him by the arm.

"Where are you going, Barr?"

He jerked away from her and started down the steps.

"Barr, where are you going?" she asked again.

He stopped and looked back at her:

"Well, if you want to know so —— bad; I'm goin' down to see the sheriff and then I'm goin' out to the JHF."

"What for, Barr?"

"What for?" Barr laughed hoarsely. "That's a —— of a question."

He turned and looked at Pastry, who had mounted—

"Get off that horse, you coyote pup!"

Pastry lost no time in dismounting.

"Now, you stay here until I'm gone; *sabe?*" ordered Barr. "I ain't goin' to have yuh packin' a talk to Chet Gunning nor to John the Baptist."

"What's gone wrong, Barr?" asked Windy.

"They're brandin' us a bunch of thieves—or rather, they're brandin' me a thief, and I'm goin' to vent that brand —— quick!"

"Huh!" blurted Windy softly.

Barr whirled and hurried down to the corral, where he began saddling. Windy and Mark exchanged glances. Pastry was standing beside his horse, nursing a very sore face, and Mrs. Wyeth still braced herself against the post, white-faced, sick at heart over it all.

From back in the house came the wailing of a child. A grasshopper crackled its way past the house and a vagrant breeze stirred the dusty foliage. Barr Wyeth mounted and rode straight out toward the main highway, never looking back, and they watched him fade out in a cloud of dust.

"Well, I gueth I can go now," Pastry's voice broke the stillness, and he got painfully aboard his horse.

They watched him ride away, going slowly, feeling tenderly of his battered face.

Mrs. Wyeth turned her eyes and looked at the two men.

"Isn't there anything we can do?"

"No, ma'am, I don't reckon so," replied Windy.

She turned wearily and went back into the house. For a moment the two men looked at each other, and then they went straight to the corral, saddled their horses and rode into the hills.

BUCK KELLY, owner of the Buck Horn saloon and gambling-house, was not a flashy type of gambler; rather he was a quiet dresser, quiet in his conversation and drank little.

But he was a hard man to beat. He played shrewdly, without visible emotion, and it was impossible to tell whether he was a hard loser or not. He had come in from "Nowhere" and bought out the Southern saloon, which he had renamed the Buck Horn.

Physically, Buck Kelly was only average. The lines of his square-cut face were deeply graven, his lips thin, and his black hair slightly tinged with gray. He loaned small amounts of money to the cowboys, which insured their pay-day patronage, and was not adverse to giving them a liberal liquor credit.

But Buck Kelly, early in the game, showed that the Buck Horn was not a brawling-hall. With his two hands he had whipped a pair of belligerent cowboys. One of them had tried to draw a gun, but Kelly took it away from him in a way that showed the crowd that Kelly knew a few good tricks.

Then, just to show the crowd that he was not unfamiliar with the weapon in his hand, he called their attention to a mineral-water lithograph on the wall, which depicted a very lovely fairy-like female person, with a flaming jewel for a head-dress. It was at least twenty feet away, but without apparent aim, he obliterated the aforementioned jewel.

This served to establish Buck Kelly as a bad man to seek trouble with, and gave him a standing with the hard-riding sons of the Bunch Grass hills.

Barr Wyeth had left the Lightning with a very definite purpose in mind. He was going to Bunch Grass and make Chet Gunning eat dirt. He was not entirely free of the potations of the night before, and when he came in sight of the drab, unpainted little town of Bunch Grass, after seven miles of dusty road, he was less bloodthirsty than when he started.

He was still firm in his purpose, but his throat was very dry and his nerves were badly in need of a stimulant. He had seen much red, but now it had blended with morose reflections until it was almost indigo. Therefore he headed for the hitch-rack in front of the Buck Horn and lost no time in imbibing liquid cheer.

And not far behind him came Pastry Pell. He had managed to keep Barr Wyeth in sight—or rather he had kept within what would have been sight if Pastry had been able to see things in a normal way, which he was not.

Pastry circled the town and entered the sheriff's office by the rear door. He found the sheriff standing in the front door, calmly surveying the street. He had seen Barr Wyeth ride into town, and he had noted that Barr rode with a rifle in a boot under his right saddle-fender. Now he turned and squinted at Pastry Pell, who had halted near the center of the room.

"For ——'s sake, what happened to you?" grunted the astonished sheriff. Pastry's face was not at all nice to look upon, as it had swelled considerably.

"Thed too much," lisped Pastry painfully.

"Oh!" The sheriff did not need any explanation.

"And he cometh down here to thoot you—Wyeth," explained Pastry thickly. "Thed he wath."

"Thasso?"

The sheriff glanced back up the street and walked up to Pastry.

"Pell, you're a —— of a lookin' thing. Did Barr Wyeth do this to you?"

"Yeth," simply.

"I suppose you went out there and told a lot of —— lies, like you usually do, didn't yuh? Some day you'll get enough sense to keep your mouth shut."

"That day ith today," declared Pastry solemnly. "If I knowed that the earth wath comin' to an end, I'd keep my mouth thut."

There was no doubt but what Pastry was thoroughly in earnest, and the sheriff smiled grimly.

"So Barr Wyeth has come down here to shoot me, eh?"

"Yeth," nodded Pastry quickly. "And ath thoon ath that ith over he thed he wath goin' after John the Baptith."

"Uh-huh," nodded the sheriff absently. 'He might, at that."

"You goin' to arretht him?" asked Pastry.

"Arrest him? What for? Because he came down here to shoot me? Or because he beat you up?"

"No thir, but becauth he ith a rustler."

"I ain't got no evidence that he's a rustler, Pastry."

"No evidenth?"

Pastry swallowed hard and felt tenderly of his swollen eyes.

"Not a —— bit!" exclaimed the sheriff.

"Then," said Pastry slowly, "you ain't got a lot more thense than I have. I think you better thwear off today too—like I did. You thed too much to me and when I thed what you thed——"

"I reckon you're right," interrupted the sheriff, "but I'll be lucky to get off with only a busted face."

"If you think thith ith luck," Pastry patted a swollen lip, which protruded like the bill of a duck, "you muth have a —— of an idea of mithfortune."

AFTER the sheriff had ridden away from the JHF ranch, Bob Kern and Splinter saddled their horses and rode away toward Comanche Cañon. John Fann and his wife sat down on the porch and deliberated over the situation.

"It's going to mean trouble, Ma." John Fann shook his head sadly. "Not trouble for us, but for——"

"Barr Wyeth is hot-headed, John. Even if you would not prosecute him, there is still—disgrace."

"And disgrace means a killing in this country, Ma."

"I wonder if Barr needed the money so badly that he stole to get it? He drinks and gambles."

John Fann got slowly to his feet and picked up his hat. "I'm going to the Lightning ranch, Ma."

"To see Barr Wyeth? John, he hates you so badly?" Ma Fann did not want to see him go.

"Yes, he hates me," agreed John softly. "I think he has taught Nell to hate me, too. I suppose it is my reward for trying to interfere in their marriage."

"But what can you do—what good can you do in talking to Barr Wyeth, John?"

"I don't know, Ma. Sometimes I wonder why he is so bitter toward us. Why have we never seen Nell?"

Ma Fann turned away. She too had heard some of the things that Barr Wyeth had said against them; things for which there was no reason. It was true that neither of them was in favor of her marriage to Barr Wyeth, but they had calmly bowed to the inevitable.

"I don't know what time I'll be back, Ma," stated John. "I'll cut across the hills, and maybe I'll go to town on my way back."

It was only about seven miles across the hills to the Lightning ranch, and John Fann rode into the ranch-house yard about fifteen minutes after Pastry Pell had ridden away, following Barr Wyeth to Bunch Grass.

Nell Wyeth was standing in the doorway, staring off across the hills as he rode up. It was the first time he had ever come to her home—the first time she had ever been face to face with him since her marriage. For a long time they looked at each other, and then—

"Where is your husband?"

John's voice was husky.

"What do you want of him?"

Her voice was barely audible, and she walked slowly out toward him. He looked down at her from his horse, but said nothing.

"What do you want of him?" she repeated anxiously now, and her voice was husky.

"I want to talk with him, Nellie," softly.

She shook her head quickly.

"Don't try to talk with him. You know how he feels toward you—how he has always felt toward you, after the things you have said about us—and he's ten times worse now."

"After the things I have said about you," repeated John Fann slowly. "What things, Nellie?"

Mrs. Wyeth shook her head.

"Too many things to remember."

"Too many to remember," repeated John slowly. "I don't think I understand. What could I say against you?"

"That's just it. Just because you did not want me to marry Barr, you have said these things, I suppose. I have managed to make Barr ignore everything, but now—" She turned and looked down the dusty road toward town— "Now, he has gone to Bunch Grass, and I think he is going to make serious trouble."

"I think I understand," said John patiently. "More talk."

"More lies, you mean!"

"I hope so, Nellie."

"And they started at the JHF ranch, too!" indignantly.

"Yes, I think they did."

"And Bob Kern had a hand in it," declared the woman heatedly. "He has been a dog-in-the-manger ever since I married Barr Wyeth. Oh, I've heard the things he has said."

John Fann stared down at her and a sad smile creased his eyes.

"If Bob Kern has mentioned your name, it has been in his prayers, Nellie."

"Is that so? Well, it wasn't in his prayers when he said that he would drive Barr Wyeth out of the Bunch Grass range and make me sorry that I ever turned him down because he had a crooked face."

"No, that don't sound like a prayer—nor like Bob Kern. I will try to find Barr Wyeth in town."

And without saying good-by, John Fann turned his horse around and rode toward town on his big, gray horse, while the woman leaned against the side of the porch and stared after him, her eyes filled with sorrow. She wanted to call after him, but she bit her lips and stifled the impulse.

Perhaps, she thought, Bob Kern might be right after all. The Lightning outfit was just about at the end of its rope. Drink and the green cloth had taken its toll of the outfit, and Bob had told her a few days before that he would probably lose the ranch.

Then the suspicion suddenly struck her. Was Bob stealing cattle to try to recoup his losses? If he was, his enmity toward the JHF would naturally cause him to take their stock in preference to any other. Pastry Pell had said that there was a yearling which had been misbranded with the Lightning mark.

She went slowly into the living-room and sank down in a chair. The wife of a cattle-thief! If anything happened to Barr, what would become of her? And Bob Kern had said—but what had Bob Kern to do about it? There were the babies—the twins. And Bob had sworn that he was going to "get" the sheriff and John the Baptist. He was going to kill them.

She sprang out of her chair and ran to the bedroom. The twins were peacefully sleeping—two tiny little bundles of humanity. For a moment she debated, looking at them nervously, then she closed the door, ran swiftly out of the house and down to the barn, where she began saddling her own horse. She was going to try to overtake her father and warn him.

BARR WYETH did not drink wisely but he drank well—and alone, which was not at all like Barr Wyeth. Buck Kelly noticed this and tried to draw Barr into conversation, but without much success.

"You ain't drinkin' on a bet, are you?" queried Buck.

"On a bet?" growled Barr. "Whatcha mean?"

"You've had seven glasses of liquor in ten minutes, Barr."

"What if I have?" Barr grew instantly belligerent, but Buck moved away and grew interested in a poker game.

"What business is it of his?" demanded Barr of the drink dispenser. "Tell me that, will yuh? How —— old does a feller have to be to know what he wants? Huh?"

Barr surveyed the place, eyes half-closed.

"I just want to tell everybody that I'm of age and that I do as I —— please. There's too many people around here that are tryin' to run my business, and I'm tellin' yuh all here and now that I'm tired of it; *sabe?*"

"Nobody tryin' to run you, Barr," assured Buck. "Go right ahead and get your skin filled with hooch. There's a bunk in the back room, when yuh get so yuh can't stand up to drink."

"Is—that—so?"

Barr spaced his words carefully and his right hand dropped close to the butt of his holstered gun. One of the men shoved back from the poker table and left his cards where they had fallen in that deal. He was taking no chances.

Buck Kelly did not move. He knew that Barr was dangerous. Came the sound of a step at the door and Barr's eyes flashed sideways to see Chet Gunning, the sheriff, watching him closely.

"Don't move, Barr."

The sheriff's voice was coldly conversational. "Ain't nobody goin' to hurt yuh—if yuh don't move."

He walked up slowly, took Barr's gun from the holster and handed it over to the bartender.

"Fangs all pulled nice and pretty," observed the sheriff. "Now yuh can move, Barr."

Barr turned and looked at the sheriff, who had stepped back. Barr's lips showed like a white scar, and the muscles of his jaws stuck out like knotted ropes, but he knew that he was helpless now and might as well make the best of it.

"I'll thank Pell when I see him," said Barr thickly. "Let's have a drink."

But no one came up to the bar. The bartender handed out the bottle, and Barr poured out a drink. He looked back over his shoulder, but no one was paying any attention to him.

"Nobody wants to drink with a cow-thief," said Barr bitterly, leaning across the bar and looking at his reflection in the mirror.

He lifted his glass and laughed harshly.

"Here's how, you —— thief!"

He started to take his drink, but the glass halted at his lips. John the Baptist was coming in the door. Quick as a flash, Barr dropped his glass, grasped the heavy bottle, whirled around and flung it straight at the old man's head.

Came the thud of the impact, the crash of breaking glass, as the bottle hit the floor, and John the Baptist went down in a heap, almost blocking the doorway.

And before any one could stop him, Barr Wyeth sprang over him and went out of the door, tore his horse away from the hitch-rack and headed for home in a cloud of dust.

Buck Kelly was the first man to reach John Fann's side and he swore with relief when he saw that the bottle had struck the old man a glancing blow on the forehead, tearing and bruising the skin, instead of making a solid impact, which most surely would have crushed his skull.

"An inch further to the left and no law on earth would save Barr Wyeth," said one of the men, as they helped John Fann into a chair and bathed his forehead.

"That sure is some caress to git from a son-in-law," observed a grizzled cow-man seriously, proffering a none too clean handkerchief to use as a bandage.

Pastry Pell came in and became an interested spectator, and the men looked curiously at his battered countenance.

"My gosh, you must 'a' been fightin'!"
exclaimed one of the men.

Pastry shook his head.

"No, thir—not me."

"That's Barr Wyeth's trade-mark," said the sheriff.

"Why did he call himself a cow-thief?" queried the grizzled cow-man. "I don't *sabe* that, Chet."

"Booze talk," said Kelly quickly. "Too much booze."

John Fann was recovering now. His eyes opened and he looked up at the ring of faces around him.

"Feel better, John?" asked the sheriff.

John nodded and got to his feet. He was a trifle unsteady as he felt of his bandaged head, but he smiled and nodded.

"Yes, I think I am all right again."

"You had a —— close call," observed Kelly.

"And Barr Wyeth never stopped to see whether it was just a close call or a cinch," added the sheriff. "Right now he thinks he killed you, John."

"Probably be dithappointed when he finds out that he didn't," observed Pastry lispingly.

"You talk too —— much!" snapped the sheriff, and Pastry nodded quickly in agreement, which brought a laugh from the crowd.

"Kelly, can I have a little talk with you?" asked John.

"Sure yuh can, John. Come back to my room."

The old man walked unsteadily, as if still dazed from the blow, but followed Kelly to his room at the rear of the saloon. Kelly motioned him to a chair and sat down on the edge of the cot.

"I want to talk with you about Barr Wyeth, Kelly," said John Fann wearily.

His hand trembled as he smoothed his white beard, which was now streaked with blood.

"All right, John." Kelly nodded and bit the end off a fresh cigar. "Go ahead."

"Do you think that Barr would steal?"

"Well, that's a hard question, John. I heard him call himself a thief today—a cow-thief, I think."

"He was drunk today," said John slowly, as if trying to excuse the statement. "Drunk and mad, I guess. My cows are being stolen, Kelly; and the guilt points at Barr Wyeth."

"Enough evidence for an arrest, John?"

"The law requires too little evidence, Kelly. It is easy to secure an arrest; not difficult to get a conviction. Acquittal does not mean exoneration. No, the law is not fair. All men may be equal before the court, but the process of law, the juggling of lawyers—no, I do not care to talk of evidence, Kelly."

"And they are your cows, John."

"Yes, my cows."

"Why would Barr Wyeth steal your cows?"

"Kelly—" John the Baptist leaned forward and looked the gambler straight in the eyes—"Barr Wyeth must be badly in debt. Cards and drink will eat up any business, and the Lightning never was a rich ranch. I think that Barr stole to try and pay his debts."

Kelly laughed and considered the tip of his cigar.

"Then why don't he pay 'em, John?"

The old man shook his head sadly. He knew that Barr must owe Buck Kelly a lot of money, and Buck should be in a position to know if Barr was making any attempt to pay off his debts.

"Kelly, will you take a mortgage on my ranch?" John Fann did not look at Kelly as he spoke.

"Your ranch—the JHF?"

John nodded—

"Yes, my ranch."

"Why—I dunno."

Kelly stretched and chewed rapidly on his cigar.

"How big a mortgage, John?"

"Five thousand dollars."

Kelly stopped chewing his cigar and stared at the old man.

"Yuh ain't aimin' to pay Barr Wyeth's debts, are yuh?"

"Five thousand isn't much on the JHF, Kelly." John Fann ignored Kelly's question.

"No, that's a fact—not much toward Barr Wyeth's debts."

John stared at Kelly curiously.

"You don't mean that Barr owes more than that."

"Barr Wyeth won the price of the Lightning ranch from me," said Kelly slowly. "He should have quit gambling."

John Fann humped a little lower in his chair and his great gnarled hands seemed to fairly dig into his overall-clad knees. His eyes were nearly closed, and Kelly thought for a moment that the old man was suffering from the blow on his temple, but he lifted his head and looked at Kelly.

"I've heard you say that you would like to own a ranch, Kelly; what will you give me for the JHF?"

Kelly laughed.

"Buy your ranch, John? Why, the

JHF is the best ranch in Bunch Grass valley, man. Do you mean that you would sell out to pay the debts of Barr Wyeth? Give up your hard-earned money to—say, John the Baptist, you're crazy! What would you do? Do you think that Barr would ever pay you back—that he would take you and your wife in and keep yuh? ——, you make me tired!"

"No," John shook his head. "I do not expect much from Barr Wyeth. Neither does he expect much from me; so we might both be surprized, Kelly. Me and Ma are getting old—don't need much.

"It has been a hard year for the cattle. The JHF has suffered with the rest—maybe more—and what's left on this range are pretty blamed thin. We haven't shipped any beef this year, Kelly; and you know what that means. I've managed to keep Bob and Splinter."

"Still, the JHF is a good ranch, John."

"Yes, a—good—ranch."

"And you want to sell it to pay Barr Wyeth's debts?"

"Perhaps," the old man smiled wearily, "I need money for myself, Kelly."

Kelly snorted audibly and humped over, examining his finger-nails, as he considered the proposition. Then:

"John, I haven't a lot of money. My business is almost as uncertain as the weather, but I've got about eight thousand dollars. Suppose I take a mortgage for that amount. The JHF is worth a lot more than that, but if you ever obligate yourself for more than that amount, somebody is going to take away your home."

"Thank you, Kelly. I—I guess it will be enough."

"Too —— much!" growled Kelly. "I'll have the papers made out, John. You come tomorrow morning and I'll have the money for you."

John Fann got to his feet and turned to the door.

"Kelly, I am trusting you to keep this quiet."

"Well—" Kelly laughed shortly—"I'm just as ashamed of it as you are, John. I think I know Barr Wyeth better than you do."

"And yet," John Fann paused with the door half-open, "it was written long ago, 'Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.'"

He closed the door softly. Pastry Pell was at the wash-stand, washing his swollen face, and he nodded to John Fann, but the old man was too deep in thought even to see him. Pastry grinned at himself in the cracked mirror and felt tenderly of his puffed lips.

AND the sheriff was right when he said that Barr Wyeth thought he had killed John Fann. He had spurred out of Bunch Grass, dazed, fighting mad and half-drunk, but above all his whirling emotions came the soul-shrinking fact that he was a murderer.

Without warning, without giving the old man a chance in the world, he had killed him. There was no alibi, no defense in the world would save him. He tried to think calmly, and the thought smote him, that he had gone to town with murder in his heart. He had announced his intentions of killing Chet Gunning and John the Baptist.

Some one was coming down the road toward him, riding in a cloud of dust. Through dazed eyes he saw that it was his wife, and he mechanically drew his horse to a stop. She was close to him now, her face tear-stained, her eyes wide and inquiring. The dust from their horses' feet eddied up around them, blurring their faces.

"I killed your father."

Barr Wyeth's voice sounded like the voice of a ventriloquist's dummy, thin and unreal.

"You killed him," said the woman in a flat voice, as if admitting the truth. "You said you would, you know."

"That was a long time ago," said Barr wearily, slowly. "I remember that I said it—a—long—time—ago."

They stared at each other through the dust. The woman brushed a hand across her face, across her eyes, as if to wipe away the things that were before her. Then she turned her horse slowly around and started back toward the ranch. Barr Wyeth looked after her for a moment and then followed in her wake.

He was sober now and no longer dazed. No jury in the valley would ever acquit him, the evidence was all against him. He remembered that Windy, Mark and Pastry Pell were present when he had said he was going to "get" the sheriff and John the Baptist.

He felt sure that Pastry had told the sheriff and that the sheriff had disarmed him for that reason. It was a case of premeditated murder; murder in the first degree, punishable by hanging. He wondered if it would be worth while for him to go into the hills and take a chance on getting away. The whole valley would be against him.

Suddenly he wondered if he had really killed John Fann. His soul clutched at the thought, but he shook his head. The bottle had been nearly full of liquor; a heavy glass bottle, and he had thrown it with every ounce of his strength. No, it must have crushed the old man's skull like an egg-shell, he thought.

It was a long way home for Barr Wyeth. Ahead of him rode his wife, looking into a blurred future for herself and the twin babies. Barr did not try to ride with her. He had hated John the Baptist, and just now, for the first time, he fully realized that John the Baptist was his wife's father.

"Why did I hate him so?" wondered Barr. "The things he said about me—that was the reason. Yes, that was it. I killed him for the things he had said about me. He didn't want me to marry Nell, but I fooled him. He said things about me and I killed him for saying those things."

Two riders were coming down the slope of a hill ahead of him, and now they came down onto the road. It was Mark Ells and Windy Hart, heading toward Bunch Grass. Both of them spoke to Mrs. Wyeth as they passed her, but she did not look up.

Both of them drew rein, as if to speak to Barr Wyeth, but he did not stop nor speak to them. He did not want to talk to any one. It seemed so useless to talk to any one now. They watched him ride away toward the ranch and looked curiously at each other.

"Can yuh beat that, Windy?" queried Mark Ells.

"Nope—yuh can't even tie it," declared Windy. "Barr was a whoopin' wolf when he left, but somethin' has sure shrunk his howl a heap. Might be worth findin' out."

Mark grinned widely and they rode on toward town.

BUCK KELLY did a lot of high-powered thinking after John Fann went out. He swore softly to himself over the whole deal, but mostly at John Fann for being such a fool. Then he lit a fresh cigar, picked up his hat and went in search of the sheriff.

He found him in his office, and lost no time in telling him what John Fann proposed to do. The sheriff listened in evident disapproval.

"I ain't got a lot of use for John the Baptist, but I'm danged if I like to see him throwin' money away on Barr Wyeth," declared the sheriff. "I don't think there's any doubt but what Barr has been stealin' cows from the JHF."

"And the —— old fool is goin' to hock his ranch to pay Barr's debts," growled Kelly. "As far as the investment is concerned, I can't lose."

"You've got a mortgage on the Lightning, haven't yuh?" asked the sheriff.

"No, but I've got enough of Wyeth's notes to cover the whole works."

"And if Barr does get that money from John the Baptist, and does pay his bills, he'll be payin' it to you."

"Sure," nodded Kelly. "It'll be a case of shiftin' the debt to an old man and an old lady."

"And Barr Wyeth will never pay it back, Kelly. You've got to refuse to give it to him."

Kelly laughed and shook his head.

"If he don't get it from me, he'll get it from somebody else, Chet."

The sheriff stared down at his toes, a frown between his eyes, but he suddenly looked up and leaned close to Kelly.

"Buck, this ain't a square deal to let the old man do a thing like this, don'tcha know it? Will you back me up in a —— fool proposition?"

"What is it?" smiled Kelly.

"You're payin' him that money tomorrow morning. If he's alone—" The sheriff hesitated—"Kelly, we've got to take a chance on him being alone and going home with the money. If he does, I'll hold him up as he comes up through the cañon, and I'll take that money.

"I'll give it back to you, Kelly. There'll be —— raised, but we'll set pat; *sabe?* I'll wear a mask and do it all up proper. We'll let the old man think he's a big loser, but he won't be. Do yuh stand behind me in this?"

Kelly laughed and nodded.

"Chet, I'm with yuh. But for gosh sake, do it right. If you get caught it'll look bad."

"Who'll catch me? Andy Allard is laid up with a sore tooth. It's a cinch, if the old man is alone. I don't think he'll go to the Lightnin' from here—not after Barr hittin' him the way he did."

"It's a —— of a note when the sheriff turns highwayman to keep another man from payin' his debts," grinned Kelly.

"Accordin' to law, Kelly," nodded the sheriff, "but I'm goin' outside the law, and I'm bettin' she works."

"—— help us, if it don't, Chet—Bunch Grass jurors won't."

MRS. WYETH rode straight to the ranch-house, where she dismounted and went inside. Barr followed her into the bedroom, where he found her on her knees beside the bed, her face buried in a pillow. The babies were awake and they stared up at him with wondering eyes.

The twins had never meant much to him before. He wanted to say something to his wife, to try to console her, but what could he say to her now, he wondered? Then he backed out of the room and took the horses down to the corral.

For a while he considered taking his swiftest horse and escaping into the hills, but decided against it. Then he went back to the ranch-house and sat down on the porch to wait for the sheriff.

The sun was setting behind the Medicine Men peaks, and the road to Bunch Grass was fading out in the mist of evening. Barr's eyes were watching the road; watching for the coming of the sheriff and his posse. Darkness comes swiftly after sunset, but still Barr Wyeth waited.

His wife came out of the doorway and sat down on the porch, but she did not speak. He looked at her, but her face was only a white blurr in the dim light. He knew that she was waiting, too. Then, out of the dim distance came the dark bulk of riders and turned in at the gate.

"They're comin'," said Barr Wyeth softly.

But the riders moved on to the corral, where they began to unsaddle; blurred misshapen figures.

"It's Mark and Windy," said Barr in a flat voice.

To Barr, it seemed hours that they consumed in unsaddling. Then they went into the bunk-house, and in a few moments later there came the yellow glow of their oil lamp. Then the door shut, cutting off the light.

"Good God, why don't they come up here?" breathed Barr wonderingly, and it was more a prayer than an imprecation.

"What is the use?" asked Mrs. Wyeth.

Then the bunk-house door opened and one of the men came slowly up to the porch. It was Windy. He stopped and appeared to be looking at the house, as if wondering why there were no lights. Then he discovered them on the porch and came up closer.

"I was jist wonderin' if you'd gone away," he said apologetically.

"No, I didn't go away," said Barr thickly.

"I didn't see no lights," explained Windy, and then hesitated for a moment before he said, "I—me and Mark was jist wonderin' if you'd do us a favor, Barr."

"A favor? What do you mean, Windy?"

"Well," Windy laughed shortly, "last night Mark got sore and tore up our deck of cards, and I was wonderin' if you've got an old deck you'd loan us."

"A—a deck of cards?" parroted Barr. "Why, I—I——"

"I'll find one," said Mrs. Wyeth.

She went into the house and came out in a moment with the cards, which she handed to Windy.

"What's new in town?" Barr asked nervously.

"Deader'n a nail."

"Wh-what?"

"Bunch Grass allus is dead," said Windy. "Thank yuh for the cards."

He turned and started back, but Barr stopped him.

"Windy, did you see John Fann?"

"Yeah, I seen him." Windy hesitated for a moment. "The bartender said he was chargin' you up with a quart of hooch and a new bottle."

"But—but John Fann—" faltered Barr weakly.

"I dunno whether he's sore or not, Barr. It's a good thing yuh didn't hit him square. I'll git yuh a new deck of cards next time I go to town. Good night."

They watched him go back to the bunk-house and the door closed behind him.

"Barr," said Mrs. Wyeth softly, and her voice broke to a sob, "Barr, you ought to get down on your knees and thank God."

"I suppose so," said Barr weakly, "but I'd likely make a mess of prayer, like I have everythin' else."

IT WAS the following morning at breakfast that Bob Kern and Splinter Martin saw John Fann's bandaged head. They had ridden in late and had not bothered Ma Fann for supper. Neither of them mentioned it, as they knew that John Fann would tell them, if he cared to have them know. But John Fann evidently did not care to tell them, and their curiosity naturally increased.

Ma Fann looked as if she had passed a sleepless night, but tried to be cheerful during the meal.

"We circled Comanche cañon yesterday," volunteered Bob, "and we made a pretty close count. There ain't over two hundred head of cows on that end of the range."

John Fann nodded thoughtfully.

"Betcha there ain't over eight hundred JHF's on the whole blamed range," observed Splinter, as he balanced a piece of ham on his knife-blade, "and we had a tally of thirteen hundred and sixty-eight this Spring."

John Fann stared at the table, as he slowly stirred his coffee.

"Bob," he said thoughtfully, "how long would it take you and Splinter to throw all the stock onto the home ranch?"

"Eh?"

Bob dropped his fork and it clattered to the floor. He picked it up and squinted sharply at John.

"Round 'em all up and throw 'em in here?"

"Yes, Bob."

"Why—" Bob stared at Splinter and shook his head wonderingly—"Why, I reckon we could do it in a week."

"A week?" repeated John Fann slowly. "Well, I guess you can go ahead, Bob. Throw all you can in the horse pasture; there's plenty of water there."

He got up from the table, picked up his hat and went out of the room. They heard him clump down the front steps and go toward the stable. Ma Fann was standing at the stove, her back toward the boys, and Bob went over to her. He put his hand on her shoulder and turned her around.

"Ma, what does it mean?" he asked.

She shook her head and her eyes filled up with tears.

"Aw, gosh A'mighty," muttered Bob. "F'r gosh sake, Ma, don't cry! Here—" he drew a chair from beside the table and gently forced her to sit down. "Now, tell us about it."

She wiped her tears away with her apron and shook her bowed head.

"He is going to sell all the stock. There was a man in Pine City who made him a flat offer a short time ago, but the price was so low that John wouldn't take it. Now, he is going to sell out. He has given a mortgage on the ranch—on—the—old—JHF."

"Aw ——!" blurted Splinter. "A mortgage on—say, this is the best darned ranch——"

"I didn't know he needed the money so bad," said Bob mournfully. "Me and Splinter have been takin' forty a month a-piece, and we didn't need it, Ma. Why didn't he say he was pinched thataway?"

Ma Fann wiped away her tears and got to her feet.

"Well, we couldn't Winter all that stock, anyway. If it should be a hard Winter, with the range in bad shape, we would have to buy hay."

Splinter walked to a window and watched John Fann ride down the road toward Bunch Grass while Bob leaned against the wall and rolled a cigaret so thoughtlessly that he wasted half a package of tobacco.

"Then, I reckon, me and Splinter will have to rustle new jobs, Ma," he observed sadly.

Ma Fann sighed and turned back to her pans.

"Mebbe," said Splinter hopefully, "mebbe somethin' will turn up."

"Yeah, tha's right," nodded Bob. "Don'tcha worry, Ma. C'm on, Splint; we've gotta job ahead of us."

They took their hats and went softly out of the house. Ma Fann looked after them tearfully. It would be like losing her own sons, and her heart echoed Splinter's hope that something might turn up. She knew why John Fann was selling out his stock, putting a mortgage on the ranch, but she would not tell Bob and Splinter.

The two cowboys saddled up and rode into the hills. Their heart was not in the work, and there was little conversation. They traveled slowly along the ridges, working back into the breaks. There were few cattle in sight. Then Bob Kern drew rein on a ridge and considered the outlook.

"Splinter, let's swing back and clean up the range between Bunch Grass and the ranch. We'll clean out this bunch when we herd in from Antelope Creek, and I don't feel like tacklin' Antelope today. Whatcha say?"

"Suits me," agreed Splinter. "It ain't noways a job that I relish, Bob. Dang it all, I wish I knowed some way to help John the Baptist. Who do yuh reckon hit him? Or was it an accident, do yuh suppose?"

"It wasn't no accident," declared Bob. "They'd 'a' told about it, if it had been."

"I'd like to meet the son-of-a-gun that hit him, Bob."

"You'd have —— little to do but to clean up the mess, if I found out first," said Bob savagely. "If the JHF was owned by anybody else, I'd 'a' helped bust up that —— Lightnin' outfit long ago. They'll keep on liftin' cows until I forget who I'm workin' for."

"Well, gosh all Friday, you ain't the only one what is workin' for the JHF," reminded Splinter. "Any time yuh feel like startin' somethin', lemme know. Any old time you forget who yo're workin' for—I'm forgettin', too."

They turned and rode slowly back down the slopes, where the dry grass and brush crackled like tissue under their horses' hoofs. Beyond them stretched the rolling hills, yellowed and browned and traversed by cattle trails. Farther beyond was the dark line of the Lost Horse River, which angled the length of the valley, and beyond that was the Medicine Men range, harsh and black in the sunlight.

Slowly they drifted around the heads of the cañons, coming nearer and nearer to the road which led from the JHF to Bunch Grass; a road that twisted its way through a narrow cañon, after leaving the flat country and opened out again before reaching the JHF ranch-house.

Suddenly Bob Kern reined his horse and leaned forward, listening.

"Thought I heard a shot," he remarked.

"Well," Splinter smiled indulgently, "is it anythin' strange that we might hear a shot?"

Bob's dusty face broke into a grin.

"No, that's a fact. I reckon I'm kinda jumpy, and I never stopped t' think."

They moved along, skirting the edge of the cañon above the road, going slowly. Finally they came out on the rim, where they could see the road far below them. There were two horses standing close together—two saddled horses.

Just beyond them appeared to be a dark mass beside the road, which might be a man.

"What do yuh reckon is goin' on down there?" queried Bob.

"Say, that looks like John Fann's big gray bronc, don't it? Ain't that a man——"

Splinter stopped. One of the dark objects was a man. He appeared to get up from his knees and went quickly over to the horses. He mounted and rode swiftly toward town.

"There's another man there!" grunted Bob. "There beside the road—that dark spot."

"And that's John Fann's horse, or I'm a liar!" exclaimed Splinter. "Yuh don't suppose that anythin'——"

But Bob had whirled his horse and was riding madly down the cañon rim, looking for a place to descend into the cañon. Splinter spurred after him. A short distance beyond, Bob whirled his horse over the edge and went angling and sliding down the steep hill, his horse fairly sitting down to keep from somersaulting, while close behind him came Splinter, ignoring the laws of gravity in his hurry to reach the road.

And they found John Fann lying beside the road, with a bullet in his head; his hair and beard gory with blood, but still alive.

"Good ——!" exclaimed Bob after a hasty examination. "He was shot from behind!"

The bullet had struck him back of his left ear and ranged upward.

"But he ain't dead?" queried Splinter anxiously.

"No, but he ain't a long ways from it. Poor Ma. This will about kill her, Splinter."

"Who was the man who just left here?" demanded Splinter. "He's the snake we're after, Bob! Didja see what he looked like? What kind of a bronc was he ridin'?"

Bob shook his head.

"I dunno, Splint. Dark colored horse, but I ain't got no idea who the rider was. Yuh can't tell nothin'—lookin' down on him thataway."

"But he's headin' toward town, Bob. One of us has got to stay here with John, while the other goes after a doctor and to try and find out who shot him."

"I'll go, Splinter; and —— help that man, if I find him! You stay here."

And before Splinter could protest, Bob vaulted into his saddle and was racing off down the road toward Bunch Grass. The other rider had had at least ten minutes start of Bob, and Bob was not sure but what this man had seen them on the cañon rim. There were innumerable places where this man could swing off the road and let him go past, but Bob did not hesitate. He wanted the doctor first of all.

It was over three miles to Bunch Grass, but Bob did not slacken speed. Behind him streamed a cloud of yellow dust, like the smoke screen of a destroyer going into action. And Bob rode with a six-shooter clutched in his right hand, praying that he might catch sight of the man who had ridden away from John Fann.

But he did not see him, and straight down the main street rode Bob, jerking his jaded horse to a slithering stop in front of the Buck Horn. He swung down and strode quickly inside.

Buck Kelly was at the bar, talking to a couple of cow-boys from the 76 outfit, while several more punchers were playing a game of pool and arguing loudly. Bob strode to the bar and up to Kelly.

"Buck," said Bob hoarsely, "John Fann was shot a while ago—shot from behind, while he was on the cañon road between here and the JHF."

"Shot!" gasped Kelly, and his face paled slightly.

"Old John the Baptist?" queried one of the cowboys.

Came the clatter of dropped cues and the pool-playing cowboys gathered around.

"He wasn't dead when I left," said Bob. "Splinter's with him. Shot in the head, boys. We saw the man who done the job, but we don't know who he was. He headed for town."

"For ——'s sake!" blurted Kelly. "Who do yuh suppose done it, Bob?"

Kelly was shaking in his shoes. He knew that the sheriff had gone out there to hold up John Fann, and he wondered if John Fann had put up such a battle that the sheriff had been forced to shoot him.

"You told the sheriff?" asked a cowboy.

Bob shook his head.

"Ain't had time. Does anybody know if Doc. Knowles is in town?"

"I see him go into Pelliser's store about five minutes ago," volunteered a cowboy. "I'll find him."

He whirled and ran out of the door, and almost collided with the sheriff, who was coming in. He shoved the sheriff aside and ran across the street.

Bob grasped the sheriff by the arm and told him as quickly as he could of what had happened. Kelly was looking straight at the sheriff and their eyes met. The sheriff seemed to have grown old, tired; not at all himself.

"Old John Fann," he repeated. "Shot in the head. All right, I'll get a horse and be right with yuh, Bob."

He turned and went out of the door. The cowboy was coming back to the saloon, bringing Doctor Knowles, a gray-haired physician who had spent most of his life in the Bunch Grass hills.

"What's this?" he demanded anxiously. "John the Baptist shot? Somebody help me hitch up my buggy-team. We'll take him home. Best place for him. Team's in my barn and the buggy's in the yard. Be with you in a moment."

Two of the cowboys went out with him. Kelly turned to the bartender—

"I'm going along, Sam," he said, and went out the rear door, where he kept a horse in a little stable.

The bartender shoved a bottle of liquor across the bar to Bob.

"Better take this along with yuh, Bob."

Bob nodded and shoved it inside his shirt as he went outside. The cowboys were getting their horses, and in a few minutes the sheriff came from his stable, leading a tall, roan horse, which belonged to Andy Allard, his deputy, who was laid up with an ulcerated tooth.

"My horse went lame," explained the sheriff wearily. "Lucky thing that Andy's horse was in the barn."

It was about fifteen minutes after Bob's entry into Bunch Grass that he rode back at the head of eight riders and Doctor Knowles in a buggy. The riders swung into a swift gallop, but Doctor Knowles kept close behind them, his seasoned team of broncos traveling like a runaway.

Buck Kelly and the sheriff rode stirrup to stirrup, but did not talk to each other. In fact, the sheriff seemed to try to avoid Kelly's glances.

John Fann was still alive, but unconscious. The doctor made a swift examination and ordered the boys to put John Fann into the buggy.

"Can't tell a thing," he replied to their questions. "Bullet is still in there. Maybe it cracked his skull."

"Do you think he'll live to tell who shot him?" queried the sheriff.

"Chances are he never seen the man."

"Better see what he's got in his pockets," said Kelly softly. "I handed him eight thousand dollars in currency just before he left town. I took a mortgage on the JHF."

The sheriff stepped over and searched through John's pockets, but there was no sign of the eight thousand.

"Who knew that he had the money?" demanded Bob.

"Judge Freeman, myself and John Fann," said Kelly slowly. He was trying not to incriminate the sheriff.

"The judge is a cripple, and you couldn't 'a' been there," said Bob. "John Fann never shot himself and stole the eight thousand."

Kelly looked at the sheriff, but the sheriff avoided his eyes. They loaded John Fann into the buggy and Doctor Knowles picked up the lines.

"Do the best you can for him, Doc," said the sheriff. "I'm going to try and find the man who shot him."

"You goin' back to town?" queried Kelly, and the sheriff nodded.

"I'll go back with you, Chet. There ain't nothin' I can do at the ranch. Lemme know as soon as yuh can what chances old John has got."

The buggy, with its cowboy escort, started on, and Buck Kelly rode slowly back toward town with the sheriff.

"Now, yuh can talk to me, Chet," said Kelly meaningly.

The sheriff turned in his saddle and faced Kelly.

"Buck, do you think I done that?"

"I'm listenin', Chet."

"Good ——! I wouldn't harm John the Baptist, Kelly. I went out there to pull off that hold-up, but I went up the cañon further, where I waited. I hadn't been there more than fifteen minutes, when I heard a horse comin', but it was comin' from the JHF.

"Then I seen Barr Wyeth ride past, goin' toward town. He didn't see me, but I figured that everythin' was off now. He'd meet old John and old John would give him the money.

"I didn't want to run into them; so I stayed there a while. I don't know how long it was, but it must 'a' been half an hour. Then I heard a shot. I got on my horse and went down the road in a hurry.

"I found John's horse comin' up the road; so I caught it and took it back with me. Then I finds John flat on his back in the road. I packed him into the shade and examined him. The money was gone. I was wonderin' what to do about it, when I happens to look up at the rim of the cañon and I sees two riders, stopped on the edge.

"I know they've seen me, and I think it's Bob Kern and Splinter Martin. Then"—the sheriff shook his head—"I reckon I got panicky, Kelly. I got my horse and busted out for town. I left the road and circled to come in the back way. I seen Bob Kern streakin' along the road. My bronc looked like he'd swum the river; that's why I'm ridin' Andy's horse."

"Yuh sure it was Barr Wyeth?" asked Kelly.

"Y'betcha. Passed within twenty feet of me, Kelly."

"If that's told, there's goin' to be a first-class lynchin', Chet."

"And I'd have a —— of a time tryin' to tell my part of it, Kelly. Why, even a jury wouldn't believe my story. All the evidence I've got is the fact that Barr Wyeth rode past me. That don't make him a murderer—not in the eyes of a jury."

"Well—" hopefully—"I hope John the Baptist lives. To —— with the eight thousand dollars. If he dies I'll tear up the —— mortgage."

They rode into town and stabled their horses. Several more cowboys were in the Buck Horn, including Pastry Pell, Windy Hart and Mark Ells. They crowded around and shot a volley of questions at Kelly, but he was able to give them little satisfaction.

"I tell yuh she's gittin' to be a tough country," declared Pastry Pell. "I'm figgerin' to pull out and see if I can't find a calm and serene locality. Who do yuh reckon shot the old man, Kelly?"

Kelly shook his head.

"I think it was a robbery."

"Killed old John the Baptist to rob him?" queried Pastry Pell. "Why, that ain't——"

"He had eight thousand dollars with him," said Kelly.

"For gosh sake!" exploded a cowboy. "Eight thousand!"

Pastry Pell's mouth remained open so long that one of the cowboys reminded him of the fact.

"And it was gone?" queried Pastry.

"Didja think they'd divide up with him?" snapped Kelly.

"Sheriff got any idea who done it?" questioned Windy.

"Yuh might ask him," replied Kelly.

"Is John the Baptist goin' to die?" asked Pastry.

"Now, ain't that a —— of a question?" complained Kelly, addressing the cowboys. "Is it any wonder that he got his face smashed?"

"Aw, I never got it smashed for askin' questions," declared Pastry. "I got it for answerin' questions that wasn't asked."

BOB KERN rode ahead and broke the news to Ma Fann. He expected her to faint or scream, but she was made of the fiber that bends much before it breaks. Swiftly she prepared a bed, while Bob heated water on the kitchen stove.

The cowboys carried the old man into the house and put him on the bed, while Doctor Knowles laid out his shining instruments and prepared to remove the bullet.

"Get Mrs. Fann away, can't you?" asked the doctor of Bob Kern. "This ain't going to be pretty to watch."

Bob went out into the kitchen and gently led Ma Fann out to the back porch.

"Set down, Ma," he urged. "There ain't a thing yuh can do in there, and I want to talk with yuh."

She sat down beside him and he put his hand on her shoulder.

"Ma, I want to tell yuh that somebody—the feller that shot John—stole eight thousand dollars out of his pocket."

She nodded slowly.

"I was afraid of that, Bob. I knew he was going to get it today."

"Why didn't he ask me or Splinter to go with him? My gosh, I'd 'a' hired an army, Ma."

Ma Fann did not reply. Bob was rolling a cigaret and as he started to wet the edge of the paper with his tongue, his eyes seemed to focus on a spot a few feet away. He spilled the tobacco from the paper as he shoved away from the steps and peered down at the ground.

"Who was here today, Ma?" he asked.

"What do you mean, Bob?"

He came back and looked down at her.

"Ma, was Barr Wyeth here this mornin'?"

She nodded slowly.

"Yes. Just after you left, Pastry Pell came past here and stopped to talk a minute. He had been in a fight, I think. He only stopped a minute. Then, about nine o'clock, Barr came. I was out here and he rode around. He asked for John and I told him that he was in Bunch Grass."

"Did he act mad?"

"No, I don't think so, Bob."

"Nine o'clock, eh?"

Bob glanced at his watch and put it back in his pocket.

"Bob, you don't think——"

Ma Fann stopped with the question unasked, but Bob knew what she meant.

"Who hit John yesterday, Ma?"

She looked at him, her eyes filled with tears.

"It was Barr Wyeth, wasn't it?"

She nodded, but did not look at him.

"I thought so," he said softly.

"But that don't mean ——"

Ma Fann hesitated, trying to convince herself that Barr was innocent.

"And John Fann was shot and robbed between nine and nine-thirty—two miles from here."

Splinter clumped out through the kitchen and came out on the porch.

"Doc got the bullet," he announced. "It's a .44."

"And nine out of every ten six-guns in this valley are forty-fours," said Bob sadly. "What does doc say about John?"

"He dunno. Says there must 'a' been some shock, but he don't think it'll be serious."

Ma Fann got up and went into the house.

"She ain't no quitter," said Splinter. "By golly, she's got more nerve than I have."

"Barr Wyeth was here this mornin', lookin' for John," said Bob meaningly. "He pulled off down the road after that."

"Yeah?"

Splinter shoved his hands into his overall pockets and rocked on his heels.

"Well, Mister Wyeth, we'll be right on yore trail. Let's go and have it over with."

"Zasso?" Bob's tone was sarcastic. "I suppose all we've got to do is to ride over there, ask Barr Wyeth for the money—and get it, eh? Then we accuses him of shootin' John Fann and he'll admit it. My gosh, that's a simple way to settle things, Splinter."

"Barr Wyeth started out to kill Chet Gunning and John yesterday," stated Splinter. "I heard the boys talkin' about it. Barr hit John with the bar-bottle at the Buck Horn and then beat it for home. That's where John got the busted scalp."

"I know," nodded Bob, and went into the house.

The cowboys were getting ready to leave and Bob went to Doctor Knowles, who was sitting beside the bed.

"How long are yuh goin' to stay, Doc?"

"Until John regains consciousness," replied the doctor. "Anyway, I shall be here several hours."

"Just so Ma ain't left alone," explained Bob. "Me and Splinter are goin' to town."

"I'll stay until you get back," assured the doctor.

Bob went out the back way, spoke to Splinter and they went out to their horses. The other cowboys were already going down the road and Bob did not try to catch up with them.

"Look for the bar-shoe, Splinter," said Bob. "So dang much travel has likely wiped out the signs, but we'll try and find where he turned off the road."

Here and there, for the first mile, they were able to find an occasional imprint of a bar-shoe, but beyond that the dust became deeper and all trace was lost. They spent some time in examining the spot where John Fann had lain, but so much trampling had erased every clue that might have been there.

From there on they searched closely, but there was no sign of a bar-shoe to be seen.

"If Wyeth was in Bunch Grass this mornin', somebody must 'a' seen him," declared Bob. "Accordin' to Kelly, nobody knew about the money, except Kelly, Judge Freeman and John himself. Barr didn't know it. He never shot old John to get the money, but he must 'a' found it afterwards. I reckon he can use it to good advantage."

They rode on into Bunch Grass. The cowboys had preceded them, and a crowd was gathered around the Buck Horn, listening to the latest news from the JHF. The sheriff was there, but was saying little. He was frankly worried over the whole thing, and was not sure that Kelly had believed his story.

Numerous questions were shot at Bob and Splinter, but they were unable to improve upon the stories that had already been told. Windy and Mark were there, listening much but saying nothing. As usual, Pastry Pell had made himself the center of interest although he knew nothing, except from hearsay.

"It ain't for me t' accuse anybody," said Pastry, "but she 'pears as a open book t' me."

"It sure would have to," laughed Splinter, "and with letters a foot-high, if you was able to read 'em with your eyes. You look like you'd tried to bull-dog an engine."

"He talked too much, like he's doin' now," said Windy meaningly.

Pastry licked his lips and tried to think of a suitable answer, but decided to keep still.

"John the Baptist was shot with a forty-four," said Bob, "but that's no clue at all. How many of us shoot a forty-four?"

A check of the crowd showed that all except Pastry Pell and Splinter used that caliber gun; their guns were forty-five Colts.

"Eight forty-fours and two forty-fives," said Bob. "That's about the average all the way across this range."

The talk became desultory and Bob caught a signal from the sheriff. In an off-hand way they drifted together and went across the street to the office.

"What's your idea, Kern?" queried the sheriff.

Bob hesitated. He knew that the sheriff would immediately arrest Barr Wyeth if he told him that Wyeth had been at the JHF that morning. In Bob's mind there was no doubt that Barr Wyeth had shot and robbed John Fann, but still he held back the information.

"I ain't got no idea, Chet," Bob shook his head. "I seen the man ride away, but I'll be danged if I could tell whether he was a big man or a little man, or whether he rode a black, brown, bay or a gray horse. They was kinda in the shadows, and you know how things look on a bird's-eye view thataway."

The sheriff sighed with satisfaction. At least, Bob did not suspect him.

"What about Barr Wyeth?" asked the sheriff.

"What about him?" asked Bob innocently.

"Aw ——!" The sheriff appeared peeved. "What are yuh tryin' to do—protect him?"

"Are you tryin' to arrest him?"

"No-o-o, not unless he's guilty. Yuh see, he came to town yesterday to kill me and John the Baptist, but I took his gun away. He hit old John with a bottle and darn near busted his head. Under them circumstances, yuh've got to admit that it looks bad for Barr Wyeth, don'tcha?"

"Too bad," agreed Bob.

"Whatcha mean, Kern?" quickly.

"Nothin'. I don't reckon there's anythin' for yuh to do but to arrest Barr and try him for it. Yo're sure he done the job, ain'tcha?"

"Nope—not sure enough. I thought I had enough evidence to shove him over for rustlin', but you and Splinter and John the Baptist craw-fished out of the deal."

"Thasso?" grinned Bob. "Well, I reckon we'll drift back to the ranch and kinda relieve the doctor. 'F yuh hear of any good evidence, lemme hear it, will yuh, Chet?"

"I will, like ——!" retorted the sheriff.

BARR WYETH was going from the corral to the house when Windy and Mark rode in that afternoon and motioned for him to stop.

"Didja hear the news?" asked Windy.

Barr shook his head.

"Somebody shot John the Baptist this mornin' and robbed him of eight thousand dollars."

Barr stared at them wonderingly.

"You ain't jokin', are yuh, Windy?"

"Honest to ——, I ain't, Barr."

And then Windy proceeded to tell Barr all he knew about it.

"About nine-thirty, eh?" mused Barr thoughtfully.

"About that time," agreed Mark, and added, "There's a lot of talk goin' on, and I reckon they mean you, Barr."

Barr laughed shortly and a deep furrow grew between his eyes.

"You wasn't over there, was yuh, Barr?" asked Windy.

Barr nodded.

"Yeah, and that's the —— of it—I was."

"Does anybody know it?"

"Yeah—Ma Fann."

"And she'll [illegible] Kern."

"I reckon s[illegible], I must 'a' left there just at the right time to meet the old man."

"You ain't got no alibi?" queried Mark.

"No. Ma Fann was the only one that seen me. I was back here at a little after ten o'clock; [illegible] won't help me with a jury."

"Maybe you [illegible] do a little runnin'," suggested W[illegible] if the old man dies—yuh can't never tell what folks might do, Barr."

"If I run, it'll look like I'm guilty."

"And if yuh stay you'll look like a corpse," added the practical Mark. "I'd run, y'betcha."

Barr turned and went to the house. Mrs. Wyeth had seen him conversing with the two punchers, and she knew from the expression on his face that something was wrong. He came up and put a hand on her shoulder.

"Nell, your father was shot this mornin' and robbed of eight thousand dollars."

"Shot?" she gasped. "Not dead, Barr?"

"No, he's alive. It happened in the cañon about half-past nine this mornin'."

"My God! Who did it, Barr?"

Her face went white and she grasped him by the sleeve.

"I reckon they think it was me," he said softly, "and I can't prove it wasn't."

"You? Why, Barr, you couldn't do that!"

Barr shook his head.

"No, I couldn't, Nell; but you know what happened yesterday."

He drew away from her and leaned against the wall.

"I've drank and gambled away the Lightning. Buck Kelly owns it—not me. I've been a —— fool, Nell, and I reckon I'm gettin' what's comin' to me."

"Don't say that, Barr," she begged tearfully. "How badly was my father hurt?"

"I don't know. Windy said he'd probably live. I don't know much about it, Nell—only what they just told me."

"But can't you prove that you didn't do it, Barr?"

"No," Barr shook his head slowly, "I can't, Nell; but I may be able to prove who did. There's no use of me trying to alibi myself. I can see where I'm up against it good and strong, unless I can slap the deadwood on the man who did do it—and make him admit it."

"Have you any idea, [illegible]"

Barr smiled and nodded.

"Yeah, I've got an idea, but I don't know whether it'll work or not. I'm goin' to Bunch Grass and take a long chance on it, Nell."

"A long chance, Barr?"

"Yeah—mighty long. I can't wait here, don't yuh see? Mebbe it's only a bluff, but a bluff is only good when yuh beat the other feller to it."

"But they'll put you in jail, Barr."

"I don't think so."

He went down the steps and turned to her.

"If my bluff don't work, Nell—" He hesitated and hitched up his belt—"I won't go to jail, because I haven't a Chinaman's chance in there. I'm the same as convicted right now. Don'tcha worry about me nor about yore dad. He's still alive and I've got a runnin' chance."

She watched him saddle his horse and ride toward town; watched him in a dumb sort of a way, as if she had no interest in him any more. She could not realize that her own father had been shot; possibly fatally, and that Barr was believed to have done it. Windy and Mark were coming up to the porch and she stared at them, as if they were total strangers to her.

"Where's Barr goin'?" asked Windy, and she shook her head dumbly in reply to the question.

"If he ain't a darned fool, he'll beat it into the hills," declared Mark. "If the old man dies, which he's liable to do——"

Mrs. Wyeth swayed and collapsed on the porch.

"You —— fool!" wailed Windy. "The old man is her father!"

They ran up the steps and looked at her. Her face was white and her body was very limp, as Windy tried to lift her.

"Help me, yuh danged fool!" he grunted. "We've got to get her into the house."

They managed to get her on to a bed and placed a pillow under her head.

"Now what do we do?" breathed Mark anxiously. "What do yuh give 'em in a case like this?"

Windy scratched his head thoughtfully.

"I dunno. Only two remedies I *sabe* are horse-liniment and castor-oil."

"Don't they pour water on 'em?"

"Yeah. Go and git the bucket, Mark."

Mark departed to the kitchen to get a bucket of water, but Mrs. Wyeth's eyes opened and she stared wonderingly around.

"You jist take it easy, ma'am," advised Windy. "Mark's gone after the water-bucket."

"What happened?" she asked weakly. "Did I faint?"

"Yeah, I reckon that's what it was. How do yuh feel now?"

"I'm all right now. I guess I just got dizzy."

Mark stopped in the doorway and set down his bucket of water.

"Reckon yuh can git along all right now, ma'am?" asked Windy.

"Yes, I am all right now. Thank you both very much."

"Yo're welcome," said Windy, and he and Mark went out through the kitchen, leaving the water-bucket.

JUDGE HENRY FREEMAN was badly crippled in the legs from rheumatism, but was still able to continue his duties as district judge. He lived in a little house at the outskirts of Bunch Grass; prolific in his profanity, ready to argue anything from Blackstone to how to cure baldness, and smoking a very vile old pipe, which, when burning properly, sounded like eggs frying in a hot skillet.

He was a small man, with a long nose, abnormally bright eyes and a broad forehead. His hair was very thin, except in the back of his neck, where it grew down over his collar and started back up again in an attempted curl, or possibly trying to loop-the-loop. On or off the bench his tongue was as pointed as a rapier, but none could say that he was not impartial in his decisions—and just.

Just now he was hunched down in his easy chair, deep in thought. A few minutes before Buck Kelly had left him, after telling the latest news, and the judge was trying to digest the facts impersonally. Kelly had not told him which way the finger of suspicion was pointing, nor did he divulge the fact that the sheriff had gone out to try to save money for John the Baptist. And while the judge pondered, his housekeeper, Mrs. Letts, a very fleshy, middle-aged woman, admitted Barr Wyeth to the judge's presence without advice from the judge.

"Mister Wyeth would see you, judge," she said, after Barr was already inside the room.

"He would, would he?" retorted the judge. "My ——, woman, how many times do I have to tell you that—oh, well, go on out and let me talk to him in private. Sit down, Wyeth—go out, Mrs. Letts."

Mrs. Letts faded out and shut the door rather hard. The judge frowned and threw his pipe on the littered table.

"Well?" He turned and faced Barr. "Go ahead."

"You heard about John the Baptist, judge?"

"Umph! A little. Probably distorted. Always is. Never knew two men to tell the same story. Go ahead."

"Judge, I want to tell you a little story. Yesterday I had trouble with John Fann."

"Tried to kill him with a whisky bottle, didn't you? I heard about it. Likely heard it all wrong. Go ahead."

"I thought I had killed him, judge. When I found that I hadn't I—" Barr hesitated—"I was glad."

"Umph! Queer, —— queer! Go ahead."

"I have hated John Fann, judge. He has said some mean things about me, and they hurt. You know I married his daughter against his wishes, and neither of us have ever been to see them since."

"—— foolishness!" growled the judge.

"This mornin'," continued Barr, "I rode over to the JHF to have a talk with John the Baptist. No, I didn't go over there to quarrel with him, judge; I wanted to make peace with him.

"But he wasn't home; so I came back down the road, thinking that I'd come to town and find him, but decided not to. I rode out of the cañon, intendin' to cut across the hills to my own ranch. I was takin' my time, and after I got out of the cañon I got to thinkin' that I'd better go on to town and find him.

"I swung around the rim of the canon, intendin' to hit the road where it comes out into the valley, when I heard a shot. I didn't think much about it right then, but before I hit the road a man rode past me, and he was sure goin' fast.

"I was back in the mesquite and he didn't see me. I stopped and done a lot of wonderin' why he was foggin' along so fast. From where I was I could see a long ways down the road and this man kept lookin' back. About half a mile below me the road curves to the right, and I seen this rider swing off the road and head into the mesquite.

"I've just about made up my mind that it ain't none of my business, when here comes another rider, goin' just about as fast as the other one was. He busted past me and I watched him until he made the curve, still follerin' the road. The last man was Bob Kern."

"What time was this?" asked the judge.

"Between nine-thirty and ten o'clock."

"Umph!"

The judge scratched his jaw and reached for his pipe.

"Who was the first man?" he asked abruptly, turning his head as he reached for his pipe.

"Chet Gunning."

"The sheriff?"

Judge Freeman's groping hand missed the pipe, and he sat down without it.

"You mean to say that the sheriff——?"

"I ain't meanin' to say anythin', judge," interrupted Barr quickly, "but those are the facts."

"But why in —— would Chet Gunning shoot John Fann?"

"There's eight thousand dollars missing," reminded Barr. "That mortgage on the JHF."

"Hm-m-m," reflected the judge. "Bob Kern and Splinter Martin saw a man ride away from the place where they found John Fann. Could you prove that you were not that man?"

Barr shook his head.

"I can't prove anythin', judge."

"What size gun do you shoot, Barr?"

"A forty-four."

"And John Fann was shot with a forty-four."

The judge reached for his pipe and began filling it, when Mrs. Letts knocked loudly and stepped into the room.

"Mister Pell would like a word with the judge," she stated stiffly. "He's outside, and I would not let him into the front door without a word from you."

The judge grinned and sucked on his pipe.

"The human bulletin-board again."

"He's anxious to see you," volunteered Mrs. Letts.

"Send him in," nodded the judge, and as Mrs. Letts went out he turned the oil lamp down so low that it threw the room into a half-light. Barr was partly hidden by the back of his chair and the judge motioned for him to turn still further away from the light.

A moment later Pastry Pell opened the door and stopped on the threshold.

"Judge, I jist wanted to tell yuh that the doctor has come back from the JHF, and he says that John the Baptist ain't liable to live, and the sheriff has gone out to arrest Barr Wyeth, because there's a lot of talk of a lynchin', if old John dies, and the sheriff's afraid the old jail ain't strong enough to stop 'em if they start and——"

Pastry stopped to catch his breath, and at this moment Barr Wyeth got up from his chair and looked at him.

Pastry swallowed hard and his mouth formed an O.

"F'r ——'s sake!" he gasped and went right back through the doorway. A moment later the front door shut with a crash.

"That was the first time I ever heard Pastry Pell stop talking, when he had something to say," declared the judge.

"He said enough," Barr was anxiously staring toward the door. "I wonder what I had better do, judge?"

"Don't ask me. Right now I'm legally unfit to even hear the case. I usually am, as far as that's concerned; because everybody brings me their troubles just ahead of the court session, but if you want an honest opinion, Barr Wyeth—go a —— of a long ways from here in the least possible time. That's about all I can see for you to do."

"I wouldn't have a chance in court," declared Barr.

"No, not a chance. You've been a —— fool, young man."

"You don't think I lied to you about the sheriff?"

"No, but the jury would. You're losing time, Wyeth."

Barr turned and went out of the door. He mounted his horse and sat motionless for a while. Beyond him were the yellow lights of Bunch Grass. Lights were twinkling in the windows of the scattered residences. Just across the way from him was a tumble-down sort of a home and a tall barn. He could hear voices.

Two bulky objects were coming down the dusty street toward him and he instinctively moved his horse into the heavier shadows of an old cottonwood. It was two cows, and behind them came a boy, herding them. They turned in at the open gate and the boy panted wearily as he dragged the old, sagging gate shut behind them. A voice called to him from the house.

"Aw, ma, I got here as soon as I could." The boy's voice was changing, and ended in a shrill treble. "Old Spot, the danged old tramp, was plumb over in Cherry Cañon. I'm goin' to put a toggle on her, y'betcha."

"You hurry up and git ready f'r supper." This in a woman's tired voice.

"Is pa there?" yelled the boy.

"He's eatin' his supper, and if you don't hurry——"

"Did he hear the news?" The boy ignored the implied threat in his eagerness to dispense information. "Bud Newell told me that old man Fann was jist about to die, and that there's sure goin' to be a lynchin' in Bunch Grass."

"You come in the house and quit screechin' such things!"

Came the rattle of a tin wash-pan, the splash of water, as the boy performed his evening ablutions. Then:

"Ma-a-a! Say, ma—kin I go to it, if there is?"

But there was no reply, and the door shut behind the excited youngster.

"Even the kids," muttered Barr aloud as he rode away from the cottonwood. "There's only one place where I'm anywhere near safe, and I'm goin' to take a chance."

He swung his horse and went slowly back toward the main road.

THE lights were turned low in the JHF ranch-house living-room. Ma Fann sat close beside the bed, watching for any sign of returning consciousness in John Fann. Bob Kern sat on the floor against the wall, knees drawn up to his chin. Beside him lay an old magazine, the cover of it littered with match-stubs, ashes and the remains of many cigarets.

Humped over in an old rocking-chair was Splinter, reading the endless list of testimonials in an old medical almanac.

"Doc ought t' be back pretty soon," he said softly.

"You've done said that a hundred times," reminded Bob. "I dunno what he can do, if he comes."

"Is it goin' to ache yuh any place, if I say it again?" queried Splinter. "And there's lots of things that you can't see."

Ma Fann smiled sadly. She was used to the good-natured bickering of the two cow-punchers. She knew that both of them were itching for action, and were only there to keep her company until the doctor came back from Bunch Grass.

Suddenly Splinter threw up his head and glanced back toward the door.

"Somebody comin'," he stated and went to the door.

He peered outside and grunted softly as footsteps sounded on the porch. Then, through the open door came Windy Hart, carrying a blanket-wrapped bundle in his arms, and behind him came Mark Ells, similarly burdened. They squinted around the room and advanced softly to a couch, where they placed their bundles.

Every eye in the room had been upon them, but now they turned to see Nell Wyeth, standing in the doorway, her dark hair in a tangle about her white face. Ma Fann had got to her feet and was staring at the girl in the doorway.

"Them is the kids," Windy broke the silence, as he indicated the bundles on the couch. "C'm on, Mark."

They tip-toed out of the room and Nell Wyeth moved aside to let them pass. From one of the blanket-wrapped bundles came the soft wail of a child.

"Ma, I had to come," Nell Wyeth's voice started bravely enough, but broke into a sob at the finish.

Ma Fann was leaning forward toward her, seemingly half-dazed, hardly realizing that it was her daughter. Then she threw out her hands to her; the light of a mother's love glorifying her tired old eyes, her face tense with emotion.

"Then, why don't you come, you poor kid?"

Bob Kern did not look at them as they came together; he grasped Splinter by the sleeve, whirled him around and led him out of the house. They sat down on the steps, and Splinter swore piously.

"What'sa matter, cowboy?" queried Bob. "You got a bad cold in yore head?"

"I—I've got the same kinda hay-fever you've got," retorted Splinter. "I reckon she didn't think Ma wanted her?"

"Ma," said Bob softly, "Ma's a dinger."

From the house came the sound of voices talking softly, excitedly.

"Makin' up for lost time," said Bob. "Gotta lot to wau-wau about. I wonder what Barr Wyeth thinks about it?"

Splinter laughed.

"I was just thinkin' about Windy and Mark," he explained. "Think of them two salty old pelicans packin' a baby per each plumb from the Lightnin'."

"More company comin'," remarked Bob, "and it ain't Doc Knowles."

A solitary horseman, indistinct in the moonlight, had turned off the main road and was riding up through the yard toward them. He dismounted fifty feet away and came slowly up to them. It was Barr Wyeth.

Bob got to his feet. He did not know what Barr Wyeth's intentions were, and was taking no chances.

"I'm packin' a white belt," said Barr, using the old Indian peace greeting.

"All right," nodded Bob. "We're takin' your word for it, Wyeth."

Barr came closer and peered at the house.

"How's the old man?" he asked.

"Lord knows."

"Still alive, though?" hopefully. "I just——"

Barr stopped. He had heard his wife's voice and he looked inquiringly at Bob.

"She just got here," explained Bob. "I dunno why she came. Windy and Mark packed the kiddies for her."

"I wonder if I could go in there, Kern?"

"Well, I dunno why not."

Bob turned and walked up to the door with Barr close behind him. Ma Fann and Nell Wyeth were standing close to the bed, their arms around each other, looking down at John Fann.

Then they both turned and looked at Barr, who was awkwardly twisting his sombrero and looking down at the floor.

"Barr!" Nell Wyeth started toward him, but stopped. "Barr, I had to come."

"Tha'sall right," he muttered. "So did I."

She crossed the room and took him by the arm.

"Barr, the sheriff came just as we were ready to leave. He wanted to know where you were and I—I had to tell him that you were in town."

"Yeah, I was in town," said Barr slowly, "but it never done me no good, Nell."

Splinter came in and shut the door.

"I ain't got much of a chance," said Barr. "Folks have kinda got me convicted already;

so I reckon I'll just have to drift, if—" he glanced around at Bob and Splinter—"if you two ain't goin' to take the law in yore own hands."

Bob shook his head.

"It ain't for us to say, Wyeth—except that we're sorry."

Barr smiled bitterly.

"That sounds nice, Kern, and I ought to thank you, but I can't help rememberin' that you said that you'd see the day that Barr Wyeth was driven off this range, and that Nell would be sorry that she turned yuh down on account of yore crooked face."

Bob started forward, his hands clenched at his sides.

"That's a —— lie, Wyeth!"

"Is it?" Barr smiled crookedly. "Well, what's the odds now. You hated me because I won your girl, Kern; and maybe I don't blame yuh. After all, yore crooked face would have been better for her than my crooked soul."

"Barr, what are you saying?"

Nell's face was ashen and her hands clawed at his shoulders.

"Well, I can't say anythin' worse about myself than Bob Kern and the JHF outfit have said about me."

Bob's face was white with passion and his eyes gleamed yellow in the lamp-light, as he moved slowly toward Barr Wyeth. Barr moved back until he was against the wall near a window.

"Wyeth," Bob's voice was icy cold, "I have never said a word against you—as God is my judge, but right now I'll say that yo're a yaller-hearted quitter. You ain't got the guts to fight for yore wife and babies. You want sympathy, don'tcha? Well, yuh won't never git it by hurtin' yore wife's feelin's."

Barr laughed, but there was no mirth in it.

"The hero makes his speech," he said sarcastically.

Behind them the door had opened slowly and they glanced back to see the sheriff framed in the doorway, a six-shooter in his hand. He was covering Barr Wyeth and paying no attention to the rest.

"I follered your wife, Barr," he said triumphantly.

Bob relaxed and backed away. The sheriff shut the door with his foot.

"I hate to do this, folks; but it's my duty. Barr Wyeth, I arrest you for attempted murder and robbery."

Barr laughed, but did not move. The sheriff watched him narrowly, as he walked slowly forward.

"Yore duty, eh?" said Barr slowly. "What was you doin' in the cañon at the time the old man was shot and robbed?"

"Me?" The sheriff stopped and the barrel of his gun wavered.

"Yes, you!" snapped Barr. "My word won't be worth a —— against yours, but I want to tell you that you'll never send me to the penitentiary for somethin' you done yourself."

As Barr finished his accusation, he whirled and dived head-first out of the window, smashing the glass and splintering the frame. It was so sudden and so unexpected that for several moments no one moved. Then the sheriff turned and sprang to the closed door. Yanking the door open he ran on to the porch.

A man appeared to be just mounting a horse beyond the steps, and the sheriff was taking no chances now. His gun spouted fire once—twice—three times. The horse reared sideways, snorting wildly, but the rider swung on to the saddle, firing across the cantle at the sheriff. Twice his gun roared defiance at the sheriff, and then the horse whirled and sped away in the darkness.

From the porch came the gasping cough and the sheriff sprawled back half-way through the door. Bob sprang outside, gun in hand, but only the diminuendo of galloping hoofs came to his ears. He turned back to the sheriff and lifted his head.

"Hurt bad?" asked Splinter, moving in close.

"Too dead to skin," replied Bob softly.

Ma Fann and Nell Wyeth moved over toward the door, dazed from the swift turn of events, and Bob turned to Mrs. Wyeth.

"Barr had t' do it, I reckon. I don't figure that the sheriff had any right to start shootin' thataway. There wasn't nothin' but circumstantial evidence, noways."

"He's dead?" whispered Nell Wyeth, pointing at the sheriff. "Barr killed him?"

"Yeah, he's dead, I reckon."

Nell Wyeth turned and groped her way to a chair, where she sank down, staring with unseeing eyes at the carpet. Ma Fann went to her and knelt down beside the chair, while Bob and Splinter looked at each other across the body of the sheriff.

"Doc ought to be here pretty soon," said Splinter.

“My ——, yore gettin’ to be some conversationalist,” observed Bob. “I hope he does come, so yuh can find a new remark to make.”

Came the rattle of loose buggy-spokes, the gritting of iron-tired wheels, and the doctor drove his buggy team up to the front porch. Bob stepped across the sheriff’s body and met the doctor at the bottom step.

Quickly he told the doctor what had happened, but before the tale was half-finished the doctor pushed past him and went inside. He knelt down beside the sheriff and gave a swift examination.

“No chance, is there, doc?” asked Splinter.

“No. Probably never knew what hit him.”

Doctor Knowles got to his feet and turned toward the bed.

“What’ll we do with him, doc?” asked Bob.

“Take him to my office. We’ll have to hold an inquest.”

The doctor turned back to the bed.

“We’ll hitch up the wagon-team, Splinter,” said Bob, and then to the doctor. “Didja meet anybody on the road, doc?”

“No.”

The two cowboys went outside and down to the barn.

“Wyeth’s a goner — sure,” observed Splinter.

“Yeah, it looks like it,” agreed Bob wearily, “but I’d give a lot to know what he meant about the sheriff bein’ in the cañon at the time John Fann was shot. They’ll just about put the deadwood on Barr Wyeth now and lynch him.”

“Could that ’a’ been the sheriff we seen leavin’ old John?”

“Yeah, it could ’a’ been—but was it? The sheriff will never tell, and they won’t give Barr Wyeth a chance to tell his story, I don’t suppose.”

THE inquest over the remains of Chet Gunning drew the range people from even the remote parts of Bunch Grass Valley. The news had traveled swiftly, and the town of Bunch Grass seethed with saddle-horses and rigs of every description.

Nell Wyeth was not called upon to testify, and Ma Fann was only called upon to corroborate Bob and Splinter’s testimony, after which she was hurried back to the bedside of John Fann, who was still unconscious.

Doctor Knowles, who was also coroner, conducted the inquest, with the assistance of Andy Allard, who had automatically became sheriff. Andy’s jaw was badly swollen from an ulcerated tooth, which Doctor Knowles refused to extract, and he was altogether a miserable sheriff.

The testimony was brief and the jury needed no deliberation to bring in a verdict to the effect that Chet Gunning had met his death from gun-shot wounds inflicted by Barr Wyeth, who was resisting arrest.

Buck Kelly seemed to breath easier now that the sheriff was out of the way. He was afraid that the sheriff might be called upon to tell the truth, and the truth might be damaging. The inquest made good business for him, and he was very well satisfied with the way things had turned out.

Much liquor was consumed, and men who had never hesitated in speaking ill of Chet Gunning, now spoke glowingly of him; which is the way of humanity. Andy Allard growled like a wounded bear and insisted on talking with a finger in his mouth, telling disinterested listeners just where his teeth hurt the most.

Bob Kern said little, although many questioned him after the inquest. He wondered deeply over Barr Wyeth’s accusation, and there grew a doubt as to Barr’s guilt. Buck Kelly had said that only three men knew of the mortgage — Judge Freeman, John Fann and himself. Judge Freeman was above reproach, Buck Kelly had not done it himself.

Who else knew about it? Bob felt sure that robbery had been the motive, and the robber must have known of the mortgage money. Andy Allard came to Bob and drew him aside.

“Awgl huh dawg docl glawf,” said Andy, with a forefinger shoved inside his aching mouth.

“I’ll betcha,” agreed Bob seriously. “I knowed a man who died after havin’ a ulcerated tooth.”

“Thasso?” Andy’s face grew grave. “My gosh! How long after, Bob?”

“Six ’r seven years.”

“Aw-w-w!” Andy grated his displeasure of such levity, and his forefinger prodded the point of pain. “Arr-r ug glawf-f-f duddang it!”

“You ought t’ go to Russia,” said Bob

"Mebbe they can *sabe* yore wau-wau—I can't, Andy."

"Um-m-m," said Andy painfully. "I wanted to ask yuh somethin', Bob, but every time I start t' ask it this —— tooth starts hoppin'. Will yuh take the job as deppity like I was before I got all this responsibility wished upon me?"

"Be a deputy-sheriff?"

"Yeah. It ain't no —— of a good job, but somebody's got to do it. Pays a hundred a month, Bob—and do yore own dodgin'. I've gotta catch Barr Wyeth, I suppose."

"And yuh want me to catch him, eh?" queried Bob.

Andy nodded and caressed his jaw.

"Yeah."

"Man huntin' don't appeal to me, Andy," seriously.

"Me neither," confided Andy. "I'm takin' a chance on Barr fillin' me with lead, and if I do nail him alive, these snake-hunters'll want to lynch him and I'll git leaded up in tryin' to be a hero and protect him."

"Maybe he'll leave the country, Andy."

"Yeah," wearily, and the finger went back inside his mouth. "Awgl gosh dagl."

Bob left Andy talking to himself, and went in search of Splinter. Ordinarily Bob would have jumped at the chance to become a deputy-sheriff at one hundred dollars per month, but just now the job did not appeal to him.

He found Splinter in the Buck Horn saloon, backed against the bar, tears running down his face. Splinter was gloriously drunk—crying-drunk. It was not often that Splinter looked upon the wine when it was red, but when he did he made a thorough inspection. Bob looked him over and went back to the hitch-rack. He took Splinter's horse to the livery stable and rode back toward the JHF alone.

At the spot where John Fann had been shot, he stopped his horse and tried to reconstruct the scene as he remembered it. John Fann had been shot from the left side of the road, or from the rear. He had evidently been allowed to pass the ambush and shot without any warning.

Bob dropped his reins and walked back from the spot. On the left side of the road the brush grew heavy and there was plenty of cover to conceal a man and a horse. The ground was so dry that it was impossible for him to find the imprint of a man's boot, but in the mold of a rotten log he found an imprint that caused him to shake his head. It was the print of a shod hoof—with a bar-shoe.

Bob went back to his horse and swung into the saddle. If Barr Wyeth was innocent, why had he ridden into that thicket? To the right of the road there was little brush, but beyond that a fringe of timber extended up the side of the cañon. Bob rode slowly in that direction, crossing the narrow gravel-wash of the dry creek bed.

An old cattle trail wound down through the timber, worn deeply from the passing of many animals, and Bob headed up this trail, watching closely. About half-way to the rim of the cañon he found another bar-shoe track, pointing up the trail.

He rode out over the top, where the trail ended. Here was a wide level expanse, almost bare of grass, and the bar-shoe tracks were very plain. Here the rider had turned the horse around, possibly to look back into the cañon, but had turned around and headed straight toward the Lightning ranch.

A flash of sunlight on metal attracted Bob's attention and he dismounted to pick up an empty cartridge shell. A glance showed him that it was a forty-four caliber revolver cartridge shell.

"Stopped here to look back," mused Bob, "and reloaded his gun. Hm-m-m!"

His brows drew down in a heavy frown, as he examined the cartridge shell. He drew his own gun, extracted a cartridge and tried to insert the empty shell, but it would not fit. Then he put the shell in his pocket, rolled a cigaret and started across the hills, trying to trail the tracks of the bar-shod horse.

For about a mile the trail was plain to Bob, but a herd of cattle had obliterated it at the head of a cañon and Bob was unable to pick it up again. He was about to turn back toward the JHF, but an idea seemed to strike him and he rode back toward Bunch Grass town.

SPLINTER MARTIN was enjoying the fullness of things—mostly his own. He had quite recovered from his earlier melancholy outlook, wiped away his tears and had started out to do big things in the world.

Splinter was fat, with the waddling walk of a duck, and he required much room. In fact, the Buck Horn was much too small for him; so he went into the street. The crowd had dwindled away and Splinter gazed reprovingly upon several cowboys who were just leaving.

"Tha's just m' luck!" he wailed. "Nobody cares what b'comes of me-e-e! Gonna be lef' all a-lone. Everythin' goin' out and nothin' comin' in. Oh, o-o-o-oh!"

A strange cowboy riding a jaded gray horse, passed him and dismounted at the hitch-rack. He was a skinny sort of a person, dust-covered, long-nosed and watery of eye. Splinter looked him over with approval.

"Brother, we welcomes yuh," greeted Splinter, with an expansive gesture. "The keys of our fair city are yours and they just held a inquest over the re-mains of the sheriff. Go as far as yuh like, but come back in time to have a drink."

The strange cowboy grinned widely and hitched up his belt.

"What town is this, pardner?"

"This here?" Splinter stumbled slightly and looked around at the street. "This here town is Bunch Grass. She's rawhide warp and bob-wire fillin'; guaranteed not t' bend, break, rust, rumble nor rattle. Take it 'r leave it, and no questions asked."

"You kinda like it, don'tcha?" grinned the cowboy.

"Like it ——!" exploded Splinter. "I love it."

The cowboy laughed and considered Splinter.

"Mebbe you can tell me where I'll find the Ten-Bar-B outfit?"

"Uh?" Splinter squinted thoughtfully, but shook his head. "It ain't in no jog'fee I ever studied, pardner."

"You ain't lived here long, have yuh?"

"Ain't I?"

Splinter balanced himself carefully and pointed at the hills beyond the town at the foot-hills.

"See them hills? Well, sir, when I came here that was the highest part of the Rocky Mountains."

"Yeah?" The cowboy grinned. "Shrunk, ain't they."

"Shrunk ——! I wore 'em off driving cows across 'em. Let's have a drink."

"All right." The cowboy seemed willing enough. "I'm headin' for the Ten-Bar-B."

"Many happy returns of the day," said Splinter, "but I never heard of no Ten-Bar-B outfit."

They went into the Buck Horn and leaned against the bar. The stranger had a thirst, and after about seven man-sized drinks he tried to sing a song, but Splinter vetoed it sharply.

"Don't shing."

"Don't shing?"

"Not a shong."

"Aw right," reluctantly. "I c'n shing good."

"Zasso? Where 'r you from, Mister Shinger?"

"Wyomin'. And I'm lookin' for the Ten-Bar-B outfit."

"You remin' me of the feller that got on his horsh and went huntin' for the moon," grinned Splinter. "And the —— thing fell on him."

"The moon did?" wonderingly.

"No—the horsh."

"Aw-w-w, ——!" The stranger helped himself to another drink. "That Ten-Bar-B outfit's near here."

"Is zasso?" Splinter wiped the back of his hand across his lips and reached for the bottle. "'F it is, it moved in this mornin', pardner."

"My name's Mellody."

"Oh, ex-cuse me. No wonder yuh wanted t' shing. Mine's Martin. Folks calls me Splinter 'count of my shape. Now Mister Mellody, since we've been properly introduced, I don't mind tellin' yuh that you'll go cock-eyed tryin' to find that Ten-Bar-B in Bunch Grass valley. It jist ain't, tha'sall."

Splinter delivered this opinion and looked around, just as Bob Kern came in through the doorway.

"Hey, Bob! C'm here. Want yuh to meet Mister Mellody, the whippoorwill from Wyomin'. Mister Mellody, this is Mister Kern, dangerous but passable."

Bob shook hands with the cowboy, who wanted to buy a drink, but Bob refused gracefully.

"Mister Mellody," said Splinter, "is lookin' for the Ten-Bar-B ranch."

Bob smiled.

"Never heard of it, Mellody."

"Thasso?" Mellody squinted down at the floor. "Tha's real funny, y'betcha."

"Do we laugh at yuh or with yuh?" queried Splinter.

"At me, I reckon. Yuh see, I've been

workin' for the Diamond-Dot outfit near Searchlight. Old man Himes owns the ranch, and he's a slicker on buyin' stock, y'betcha."

"Buys cheap, eh?" asked Bob.

"Dang right. That's how I finds out about this Ten-Bar-B outfit. The feller what owns it drives about three hundred head over into our range and sells most of 'em to old man Himes. He said that the range was plumb burnt out over here, and he was willin' to sell cheap to git rid of 'em."

"Yeah?"

Bob moved in closer and nodded to the bartender to set out the glasses.

"Yeah," nodded Mellody. "I had a run-in with old man Himes, and quit. This here Ten-Bar-B *hombre* talked a lot about his place over here; so, when I got out of a job, I drifted over to see if he could use me."

"Said it was near Bunch Grass?" queried Bob.

Mellody gulped his liquor and nodded.

"Anyway, I sure as —— understood it thataway."

"Didn't say what his name was, did he?"

"Smith. We all called him 'Windy,' for short, 'cause he talked quite a lot."

"There ain't no Windy Smith around here," said Splinter, shaking his head. "Leave it to Buck Kelly, if there is."

Buck was coming in behind the bar from the rear of the room, and he looked inquiringly at Splinter.

"Here's a pilgrim from Wyoming, Buck," explained Splinter, "and he's lookin' for the Ten-Bar-B, which is run by Windy Smith. You ever heard of it?"

Buck frowned and squinted at Mellody.

"We're provin' it by you, Buck," said Splinter grinning.

Kelly shook his head.

"I never heard of the place."

" 'S —— funny," Mellody shook his head and reached for the bar-bottle. "Anyway, I ain't worried a heap. Mebbe I can git me a job."

"Would yuh know Windy Smith if yuh seen him?" queried Kelly.

"Y'betcha. Well, here's to yore old sunbonnet."

Kelly drank with them and walked back to the poker game, where he sat down. Mellody was beginning to get very intoxicated and Splinter began to cry softly; so Bob made a sneak out the front door and started across the street, when Doctor Knowles drove up to the front of his office.

Bob went over to him and the doctor was grinning widely.

"John the Baptist woke up," he informed Bob. "I was afraid it might have affected his mind, but he's as clear as a bell. Had to swear at him to make him stay in bed."

"By golly, that's fine!" applauded Bob. "Yo're some doctor. Betcha some of them city doctors would 'a' killed the old man. He didn't say anythin' about seein' the feller that shot him, did he?"

"He didn't even know what happened to him, Kern. Don't remember a thing. Was just riding along, when something hit him a terrible blow."

"Knows he got robbed, don't he?"

"Yes. I guess it hurt him more than the bullet, but he didn't say anything."

"No, he wouldn't beef about it," agreed Bob warmly. "Are they goin' to bury Chet Gunnin' tomorrow, doc?"

"Yes; in the afternoon."

"Will yuh do me a favor, doc?"

"Why, I think so, Kern; what is it?"

"Before yuh git ready to bury Chet, will yuh cut out one of them bullets and let me see it?"

"Sure. What's the idea, though?"

"Kinda curious, doc. Yuh see, we don't know just what did kill him. Them holes are there, but we dunno what is inside of him."

"I see," admitted the doctor. "Well, that might be a good idea, Kern. I'll have the bullets for you in the morning."

"That's kind of yuh," nodded Bob. "S' long, doc."

Bob went back to his horse. He knew there was no use of trying to get Splinter to go back to the ranch, so he rode away alone, wondering who Mellody was and what or where was the Ten-Bar-B outfit. Bob knew every brand in the county, and there was no such iron used on any of the ranches.

He rode back to the JHF and stabled his horse before going into the ranch-house to see John Fann. Nell Wyeth met him on the porch, anxious for the latest news.

"Ain't heard a word," stated Bob softly. "Nothin' been done yet."

She nodded dumbly and turned back into the house. John Fann was propped up in bed and he grinned widely at Bob.

"Caused some excitement, didn't I, Bob?"

"Yuh sure did, John. How are yuh feelin'?"

"I'm feelin' fine."

"Well, you take it easy," advised Bob, drawing up a chair. "Doc Knowles tells me that you ain't got no idea who shot yuh."

John Fann shook his bandaged head.

"Never knew I was shot until they told me."

"Been a lot of things happenin'," observed Bob.

Nell Wyeth had stopped near the center of the room, but now she turned and went into the kitchen. John Fann's eyes followed her and he shook his head sadly.

"Poor little girl. It's a hard row of stumps for her, Bob."

"Yeah," nodded Bob, "she ain't had a square-deal."

"Too much hate mixed up in it all," sighed John Fann. "I have never said one word against Barr Wyeth, yet they hate me for the things I have said."

"That's right," agreed Bob. "Accordin' to Barr, I've said some danged mean things against him and Nell, but I never said 'em, John."

John Fann shook his head thoughtfully and leaned back wearily on his pillow.

"Where's Splinter?" he asked.

"He's in town. The strain was too much for him, John."

"Drinking? I often wonder what would happen to Splinter if he didn't get drunk once in a while. Did you boys bring in any of the stock yet?"

"Not yet, John. There has been too much happening lately. Did you ever hear of the Ten-Bar-B outfit?"

"No, I don't think I ever did, Bob."

Bob explained about the cowboy from across the line, who was looking for such an outfit.

"Must be a Wyoming register," said John, "I don't remember of ever seein' it in the Montana register. Likely got his directions mixed."

"Yeah, I reckon he did," agreed Bob doubtfully, "but the rest of his stuff kinda pointed toward this range. I'm goin' to have another talk with him, if he don't leave too soon."

Bob got up and turned back toward the door, as Ma Fann came out of the kitchen and joined him. She walked out to the horse with him.

"Have they started hunting for Barr?" she asked softly.

Bob shook his head.

"I don't think so, Ma. Andy wanted to give me the deputy job, but I didn't take it. I wasn't goin' back to town tonight, but I think I will. Feller down there that I want to see."

"Nell's almost crazy over it, Bob. She just walks around and don't say anything, except to wonder what has been done. Find out everything you can, will you, Bob? And let her know about it?"

"Yeah, I'll do that, Ma. Barr's had a good chance to make a long getaway, and I sure hope he keeps away."

Bob swung on to his horse and turned toward the gate just as Pastry Pell, his horse reeking from a hard run, swung off the road and galloped up to them.

"Say!" he blurted, "Splinter shot that Wyomin' cowboy a while ago, and they've got Splinter in jail!"

"Splinter shot him?" exclaimed Bob. "Shot Mellody?"

"Yeah, I think that's his name."

"For ——'s sake, what for, Pell?"

"Over a poker game. They was both drunk. Andy Allard put Splinter in jail."

"For Heaven's sake, what will happen next?" said Ma Fann wonderingly.

"A lot depends, Ma," said Bob grimly. "I've got to see Splinter first."

"I'll ride back with yuh," offered Pastry Pell, but Bob had spurred his horse into a run and Pastry's horse was in no shape to make the trip again at that speed.

BOB was riding wild and with no purpose in his mind, except to hear the story from Splinter's own lips. It was not like Splinter to do a thing like this, especially when he was drinking. Liquor only served to make Splinter more congenial. And Splinter did not care for poker.

Bob jerked his horse to a panting stop at the Buck Horn, dismounted and strode inside. Buck Kelly was at the bar, talking to Andy Allard, and he squinted closely at Bob as he strode up to them.

"Talk a little, Buck," advised Bob hoarsely. "I want to get this whole story in a few words."

"Well," Buck smiled faintly, "I guess I can tell it to you in a few words. The strange cowboy wanted to play poker and he sort of hoodled Splinter into the game. They were both drunk and I didn't want to play with them, but they insisted.

"Only a few hands were dealt, when Splinter kinda fumbled with the discards. The stranger called him for it and then Splinter went for his gun, or acted like he was goin' to, and the stranger reached for his gun. Splinter shot first."

"And Splinter goes to jail for it, eh?" queried Bob.

"Well—" Buck spread his hands helplessly—"the stranger accused Splinter of cheating, and Splinter drew first."

"Don't blame me," wailed Andy, "I had t' do it. Between gun-fights and this —— tooth of mine, I'll be crazy in another day."

Bob squinted one eye at the mirror and rubbed his chin violently.

"Can I have a talk with Splinter, Andy?"

"Yeah—sure. I reckon he's sobered up a lot. C'm on."

"Who else seen this shootin', Buck?" queried Bob.

"Well, I happened to be with them at the table; the bartender was up near the front window, and Pastry Pell was just comin' in the back door."

"All right," nodded Bob and followed Andy out the front door.

"Was this Mellody person killed plumb dead?" asked Bob, as they crossed to the jail.

"No, he ain't dead yet, Bob; but doc says he ain't got a chance in the world."

They went in through the sheriff's office and Andy unlocked a cell door. Splinter was lying on a cot, smoking a cigaret; as unkempt a figure of a cowboy as could be imagined. His eyes were blood-shot, face dirty, but he grinned at Bob and motioned him to a stool.

"You sure went and raised ——, didn't yuh?" said Bob reprovingly.

"That's what they tell me," agreed Splinter hoarsely, "but I don't remember a danged thing, except—" He hesitated and closed his eyes for a moment. "Say, it's —— funny that I can't even remember playin' poker."

"You must 'a' been pretty drunk."

"Ke-rect. 'S a funny thing just the same."

Splinter dug down in his pocket and drew out a twenty-dollar bill and a few cents in change.

"I had twenty-seven dollars when I started drinkin'. I figure I must 'a' spent about seven dollars f'r hooch. What in —— did I buy poker-chips with? You know dang well that Buck don't play against credit in his poker games."

"Yuh sure that's all yuh had?" queried Bob.

Splinter laughed wryly. "Cowboy, I ain't no book-keeper, but I sure *sabe* my own finances."

"But can't yuh remember nothin', Splinter?"

"Not much. There was a poker game, Bob; I remember that much, and I remember settin' down in a chair. Then I kinda remember that somebody came in and I heard Mellody speak to him."

Splinter shook his head helplessly.

"Buck sure sells bad hooch. I remember that shot. It kinda woke me up, and the next thing I knowed I was bein' slammed around, and then I'm in jail, with Andy explainin' to me that I've killed Mellody."

"Uh-huh," reflected Bob. "And Mellody spoke to somebody, did he?"

"Aw-w-w, I'll be —— if I know, Bob. I think he did. You know how hazy things git when yuh drink a lot."

Bob turned to Andy—

"You got Splinter's gun, didn't yuh?"

Andy nodded slowly.

"Yeah. One cartridge had been fired. It's out in the desk, if yuh want to see it, Bob."

"Never mind. I'm goin' over and talk with Doc Knowles. Take it easy, Splinter."

"That's —— good advice," said Splinter dryly.

Bob went up the street and into Doctor Knowles' office, where he found the doctor in a chloroform scented atmosphere.

"Is that cowboy still alive, doc?" he asked.

"Yes, he's alive yet, and I think he'll pull out of it, but he sure had a close call, Kern. The bullet skidded on a rib and missed his heart. He's tough. The shock of the bullet almost killed him. What's got into this country?"

Bob shook his head.

"I dunno, doc. Didja take the bullets out of Gunnin' yet?"

The doctor opened a drawer of his desk and took out a crumpled envelope, from which he took two lumps of lead. One was badly battered, but the other was almost in its original form. Bob looked them over closely and handed them back to the doctor.

"Keep 'em for me, will yuh, doc?" requested Bob. "Yuh never can tell when I'll want 'em."

"Certainly. Did you see John the Baptist?"

"Yeah, and he's all hunkydory, doc. And yuh think that Mellody will pull through?"

"Unless I'm badly mistaken. He's unconscious yet from shock and loss of blood, but he'll pull through. He was soaked with whisky and I guess he never felt the pain of it, but he'll yelp when he wakes up."

Bob grinned and thanked him, as he went back to the street. Pastry Pell was just riding up to the hitch-rack and he waited for Bob to cross to him.

"You sure ride fast," grinned Pastry. "Your dust ain't settled yet, Kern."

"No, and it ain't goin' to settle either," said Bob meaningly.

Pastry trailed him into the Buck Horn, and Bob went straight to the crowd around the poker table.

"That cowboy ain't dead, Buck," he stated, "and Doc Knowles says he'll live. I'll buy a drink for the house."

Nobody refused the invitation, and they lined up at the bar.

"Splinter was wonderin' just how he stood in that poker game when it busted up," stated Bob to Kelly. "He's kinda hazy over it yet."

Kelly scratched his nose and grew very thoughtful.

"Danged if I know, Kern. Splinter bought either five or ten dollars worth of chips, and I don't know just how he stood. Anyway, I'll give him a ten-spot, just to be on the safe side."

"Tha'sall right," nodded Bob.

"Is anythin' bein' done to catch Barr Wyeth?" questioned a cowboy.

Kelly laughed.

"I reckon everybody is waitin' for the reward to be announced. Andy can't get anybody to take the deputy job, and he ain't got no jailer to take care of his prisoner now; so he's kinda up against it."

"I'm goin' to take that job," announced Bob seriously.

"You are?" laughed Kelly. "What's the idea, Kern?"

"Just want to show off, I reckon," grinned Bob. "Mebbe somebody'll take a shot at me, I dunno."

Andy Allard had come into the saloon in time to hear Bob's declaration, and now he shoved his way to Bob's side.

"You mean that, Bob?" he asked anxiously.

"Sure thing."

Andy did a double-shuffle and slapped Bob on the back.

"Hurrah for our side! There's fifteen hundred dollars reward for Barr Wyeth. The county offers a thousand and the State gives a measly five hundred."

"Dead or alive?" asked a cowboy.

"For the arrest and conviction," stated Andy. "Yuh can't convict a dead man, can yuh?"

Kelly laughed shortly.

"Yuh might arrest him, but yuh never will convict him."

"Why not?" asked Andy.

"After what he's done?" queried Kelly. "You'll have a —— of a time savin' him for trial."

"Maybe he never done it," said Bob slowly.

"That would be hard to prove."

"Yeah, it—might," admitted Bob slowly. "Anyway, I hope this Mellody person lives."

"What do yuh know about him?" asked Andy.

"Too danged little. It's the things I want to know about him, Andy. I'm wonderin' who told him that the Ten-Bar-B outfit was located here."

"Whatcha want to find them for?" asked a cowboy.

"They sell their cows cheap," explained Bob, "and I'd like to buy some stock cheap."

"Mebbe the jasper that robbed John the Baptist had the same idea," suggested Andy.

"I'll ask him—some day," smiled Bob, "and I don't care whether he answers me or not. Let's go over and talk to my drunken, gun-fightin' bunkie."

Bob and Andy started across the street, when Doctor Knowles came out of his office and motioned for them to come over there.

"Mellody is conscious now," he stated, "and perhaps he can answer a few questions if you've got anything important to ask him."

They followed the doctor into a bedroom at the rear of the house, where Mellody had been placed. He stared at the ceiling, muttering foolishly.

"Delirious again," grumbled the doctor. "He was all right a minute ago. Asked about Splinter and a man by the uncommon name of Smith."

"Yeah?" Bob was interested. "Say anythin' else?"

"No, not much. Didn't remember getting shot, I guess."

Mellody's clothes had been carelessly thrown on a chair, and one of the boots attracted Bob's attention. He picked it up and looked it over. The boots were nearly new, but a chunk had been torn out of the edge of the sole, and above that, just at the bulge of the little toe, there was a decided crease in the leather.

Bob handed the boot to Andy and called his attention to the damaged sole.

"Looks like a bullet done that," observed Andy. "It ain't been done long ago either."

Bob tossed the boot back on the chair and turned to the doctor—

"Let us know if he starts talkin' sense, doc."

The doctor nodded and they went back to the street.

"We're goin' back to the Buck Horn," explained Bob, "and you let me do the talkin', Andy."

" 'F you don't, I won't know what we're there for," grinned Andy.

There had evidently been much conversation regarding them, because the talk died quickly as they came in. Bob led the way over to the poker table and turned to Kelly.

"Buck, will yuh fix the chairs like they was at the time of the shootin'? We'll need this for evidence when Splinter comes to trial, don'tcha see?"

"Sure," agreed Kelly, and proceeded to place the chairs around the table.

"You was facin' the back door, eh?" said Bob. "Mellody was facin' the front door and Splinter was kinda between yuh."

"Yes, that's the way we were sittin'."

"Did Mellody fall backwards when he was shot?"

"No-o-o, he fell forward on the table."

"I see," muttered Bob, as he drew a chair away and peered under the table.

Other men stooped and looked under the table, but Bob straightened up, a queer expression in his eyes.

"I reckon that's all I wanted to know, Buck," he stated and turned toward the door.

"What do you mean?" queried Kelly. "You talk like it wasn't——"

"Got a right t' talk, ain't I?" demanded Bob. "I'm a deputy-sheriff."

He laughed mirthlessly and went out the front door, while Andy plodded along behind him.

"Whatcha find out?" asked Andy anxiously, as they crossed the street. "Lemme in on it, Bob."

"My ——, don't bother me when I'm knittin'!" exploded Bob. "I might drop a stitch."

Bob went straight to a State map on the office wall and studied it closely. He drew a penciled line from Searchlight to Bunch Grass and compared it with the scale of miles on the map. Then he turned to Andy.

"Say, we ain't a —— of a ways from Wyomin', are we."

"That," said Andy disgustedly, "is a —— of a thing to hear yuh say, when I was looking to hear somethin' worth listenin'to."

"Well, it ain't much," agreed Bob, "but it's one of the stitches. Didja ever consider that Comanche Cañon might be an easy pass across the main divide?"

"I know danged well it is," said Andy. "I've been up to the top, where I could look into Wyomin'. Why, it's a railroad grade all the way. Betcha some day they'll run trains through that pass."

Bob nodded and studied the map again.

"What do we do now?" queried Andy.

"Oh yeah." Bob scratched his chin thoughtfully. "Well, I suppose we might as well go out and arrest Barr Wyeth."

"Zasso? Just like that, eh? Yuh don't suppose that Barr Wyeth would stay in this country after he'd killed the sheriff, do yuh, Bob?"

"No-o-o, I don't reckon he would, under them circumstances."

"Then what do yuh mean?"

"Andy," said Bob thoughtfully, "a crook is like a calf; if yuh give 'em enough rope they'll tangle themselves. There ain't never been an outlaw yet, if he was left alone long enough, that didn't wind up his own little ball of yarn. Mebbe they figure that it's hard luck that stops 'em; mebbe they can look back and see where a little mistake upset their game, and mostly always that little mistake was in goin' too —— far.

"That's the trouble with 'em, Andy. The game looks so easy to beat that they pyramid their bets. When yo're right, there's an element of luck, but when yo're wrong, yore luck is packin' a hoodoo. The way I figure it is this: Crime is a payin' proposition—for the devil."

Andy listened closely and nodded his head.

"Yeah, I betcha yo're right, Bob; but I don't know a —— thing yo're talkin' about. I *sabe* the calf and the rope idea, but I dunno who yo're referrin' to."

"I ain't sure myself," grinned Bob, "but didn't I say a lot of stuff, like a temperance orator?"

"Yuh sure can use words, cowboy," said Andy generously. "But I'd rather have yuh tell me what yuh was lookin' for under Buck's poker-table."

"Didn't yuh see it?" queried Bob. "Yuh didn't? There's a bullet hole in the floor, Andy."

Andy rubbed his nose violently and caressed his sore jaw.

"Uh-h-h-huh. That's the same bullet that nicked that cowboy's boot-sole, eh?"

Bob nodded thoughtfully.

"Yeah, the same bullet."

"Now," said Andy wonderingly, "who in —— tried to shoot him in the feet, Bob?"

"That nicked sole was just a little mistake that the devil put in, Andy. I betcha he's laughin' right now."

"I'll betcha he is, but I don't know what for," confessed Andy foolishly, as he got to his feet. "Let's go and git some supper."

AFTER supper they ran into Windy Hart and Mark Ells, and Bob asked them what they were doing.

"We're still with the Lightnin'," grinned Windy.

"Runnin' it on yore own hook?"

"Well, yuh might say so," agreed Windy. "We was goin' to pull out, 'cause there wasn't nobody to pay us a salary nor to tell us what to do; but Buck Kelly sent that gabby-mouthed Pell out to tell us to stay on the job. I reckon Kelly is goin' to take over the outfit."

"I s'pose," nodded Bob seriously, and then, "Windy, I'm goin' to ask you a question, and I hope you'll answer it straight. Does Barr Wyeth ride a horse that wears a bar-shoe?"

Windy hesitated over the answer and looked closely at Mark Ells, who rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"He did," said Mark slowly. "That hammer-headed sorrel wore a bar-shoe."

"But that sorrel has been dead for a month," stated Windy. "Got cut up in the bob-wire and we had to shoot him."

"I tell yuh where yuh can find the remains," offered Mark. "Yuh know where yuh hit the wire fence this side of the ranch? She kinda angles along the hill? Well, that sorrel is in the first coulee off the road. Likely the coyotes have packed it mostly all away, but yuh might take a look."

"I'm sure obliged to yuh," said Bob. "I sure am."

"First time I ever got thanked for a dead horse," grinned Mark.

"What's this stuff about the reward for Barr Wyeth?" queried Windy. "Fifteen hundred, is it? Suppose they lynch him, who gets the reward?"

"There won't be none paid," said Andy flatly.

From there they went over to Doctor Knowles' office to inquire regarding the condition of Mellody. The doctor took them back into the bedroom and they found Mellody fully conscious but very peevish.

"By ——, I hope you jaspers ain't tongue-tied," he said painfully. "This —— doctor won't talk, except to tell me that I got shot in a poker game and that the *hombre* that shot me is in jail. Is that right?"

Bob nodded.

"Yeah, that's true, Mellody."

"Who shot me?"

"Splinter—the fat cowboy you was drinkin' with."

"Yeah?" Mellody's eyes opened wide. "What fer?"

"Don'tcha remember of accusin' him of cheatin'?"

Mellody wrinkled his brow and shut one eye as he squinted at Bob.

"Did I? Well, by the mighty Missouri River, that's queer hooch we was drinkin'. My ——, I must 'a' been drunk! 'F anybody'd asked me, I'd 'a' said that the game hadn't started yet."

"Thasso?" Bob grinned widely. "Then who did shoot yuh, Mellody?"

"—— if I know—cause I had my head turned."

"How many shots were fired?"

"How in —— do I know? I never heard any of 'em."

"Were you so drunk that you wouldn't

'a' heard a shot fired—if yuh hadn't been hit?"

"Not me. I never was so drunk that I couldn't start runnin' any old time they starts throwin' lead."

"Then yuh don't know whether Splinter shot yuh or not, eh?"

Mellody shook his head.

"I tell yuh I don't know who shot me. He was awful drunk, I remember that; so drunk that he couldn't get money out of his pocket."

"Who was you lookin' at when you turned around, Mellody?"

"I been wonderin' about that myself. I was pretty drunk, and I might 'a' been mistaken, but I thought it was Windy Smith, the foreman of the Ten-Bar-B outfit."

"Who's he?" queried Andy, but no one seemed able to explain.

Bob nodded slowly and turned back to the door. It was dark outside, and half-way across the street to the Buck Horn they met Windy and Mark.

"Gotta question to ask yuh," said Bob, grinning. "What color horse has Barr Wyeth been ridin' since his sorrel had to be shot?"

"Sorrel," grunted Windy. "They looked a little alike, but the one we shot was bigger."

"Thank yuh again," grunted Bob and headed for the hitch-rack.

"Where yuh goin'?" asked Andy.

"Goin' to take a little ride, boss. You stay here and keep your eyes and ears open. Tomorrow is Saturday and every body in the country will be in town; *sabe?* It would be a —— of a fine day to pull off a lynchin'."

Andy gawped after him as he rode away down the street, and turned back toward the office. Andy was a slow thinker, and had no idea what it was all about, but he had confidence in his new deputy.

Bob rode straight to the place designated by Mark Ells, and had little trouble in locating the remains of the hammer-headed sorrel. There was little left except bones, but with the aid of matches he was able to find that all four shoes were still on the hoofs, and the right front hoof was shod with a bar-shoe.

A coyote yapped at him from the side of the hill, and from back in the brushy coulee came the spitting snarl of a hunting bobcat that had probably been cheated of its prey. Bob swung back on his horse and headed into the hills toward the JHF ranch.

He whistled unmusically between his teeth and grinned at the moon which was just peeping over the top of Blackfeet Pass.

"My knittin' is almost done, bronc," he told his horse, "or mebbe it's more like weavin' a pattern so that both sides come out the same. A fool crook only looks after the big things, and the first thing he knows a little thing gets tangled in his spurs and trips him."

It was a long ways across the hills to the JHF, but Bob was in no hurry. It was nearly midnight when he rode down the slope behind the big barn and tied his horse to the corral fence. There was a faint light in one of the ranch-house windows, and Bob grinned as he noticed that this was in the spare bedroom.

He went softly into the bunk-house and sat down beside a window, without lighting a lamp. The moonlight flooded the old ranch-house, and cast heavy shadows across the yard. A cow bawled sleepily and a big, gray owl drifted like a shadow across the moonlit space and faded into the cottonwoods behind the house.

Then Bob saw a man come out of the shadows and stand looking toward the house. After a moment he walked boldly across the lighted space and up to the window, where he blended into the shadows.

Bob stepped to the door and opened it a few inches. He heard the soft creak as the window was raised, but could hear no voices. Quickly he turned and went to a rear window, which he opened, and crawled outside. By circling the corral he could keep in the shadows of the barn until he came to the shadows of the cottonwoods.

He went softly, taking plenty of time. The lamp had been extinguished now, but he could hear soft voices. Cautiously he circled the house until only the corner separated him from the man at the window. It was Barr Wyeth talking—

"—last place they'd look for me, and I had to have food."

He was unable to hear Nell Wyeth's reply, but she must have told him to come into the kitchen, because he said—

"Anythin', Nell, just so it's food."

He stepped away from the window, came around the corner and ran into the muzzle of Bob's six-shooter.

He smothered a curse and his arms instinctively went up. Without a word, Bob stepped in and took Barr's gun from its holster. The moonlight flashed on his badge and Barr saw it.

"Turned sheriff to get me, eh?" he sneered.

"Somethin' like that," said Bob coldly. "Turn around me and head for the kitchen. Yuh don't need to keep your hands up, Wyeth."

Nell Wyeth had unlocked the kitchen door and was putting food on the table when Bob herded his captive inside. She was only dressed in a night gown and her hair was hanging loosely around her shoulders.

She stared at Bob and her hands went to her mouth, as if to stifle a scream. Barr sank down in a chair and stared at the floor. He was uncombed, unkempt and the lines of his face were graved deeply.

"He turned deputy sheriff to get me, Nell," said Barr in a flat voice. "He's makin' good."

The sound of voices had awakened Ma Fann and now she leaned in around the dining-room doorway, her night-cap awry, her old eyes heavy with sleep.

"What in the world!" she exclaimed wonderingly.

Bob said nothing, but he watched Barr closely. Nell turned away from the table and sank down in a chair, crying wearily.

"Ma," said Bob softly, "I reckon Barr Wyeth is hungry."

Barr lifted his face and stared at Bob.

"A —— of a lot you care, Kern."

"I s'pose," said Bob sadly.

"I'll get him a meal," said Ma Fann. "Just wait until I slip on some clothes. Nell, you better put on some, too."

Nell got to her feet and walked to the door, where she turned and looked at Bob.

"You're satisfied now, aren't you?" she asked bitterly. "You are a very good—prophet, Bob Kern."

"Yes'm," nodded Bob, "I s'pose I am."

Neither of the two men spoke while Ma Fann was dressing. She had explained things to John Fann, who came out with her, his head still swathed in bandages. He looked at Barr Wyeth and shook his head sadly, but turned to Bob—

"You are a deputy sheriff now, Bob?"

"Yeah, I am, John. Took the job today."

"I suppose I'm already convicted," observed Barr. There was a trace of his old sarcastic smile now.

Bob nodded—

"Yeah, I s'pose you'd call it that."

"Can you wait for me to make a pot of coffee?" asked Ma Fann. "Everything else is cold."

Barr drew his chair up to the table and attacked the food like a starving man.

"Don't make me wait for the coffee. I'd like some, y'betcha, but I can't wait."

Ma Fann watched him for a moment, shook her head sadly and began preparing a pot of coffee. Nell came in and sat down across the table from Barr. She did not look at Bob, who had sat down, holding the six-shooter in his lap. He had put Barr's gun in his own holster.

"Splinter still in jail?" asked John Fann.

"Yeah."

"Splinter?"

Barr Wyeth turned and stared at Bob.

"Did you put him in, too?"

"Nope. Andy put him in for gunnin' a feller in a poker-game. The man will get well."

"Well, I'll have company, anyway," observed Barr.

"Barr, don't talk like that!" Nell Wyeth's voice was full of tears. "Oh, why did you come here tonight? We all thought you had left the country and was in a safe place."

"Our friend Kern didn't," said Barr bitterly.

"Do you have to take him to Bunch Grass?" asked John Fann.

"Yeah, I do, John," nodded Bob. "Why ask me that?"

"Knowing how the people feel about him," said John, "don't you think it is a little dangerous? And tomorrow everybody in the country will be in town, Bob."

"I reckon that'll be all right, John."

Barr finished his meal and turned to Bob—

"Well, let's go, Kern, I'm ready."

"You ain't runnin' this party," stated Bob, a half-grin on his face. "Yuh see, yo're a dangerous person, and I'm waitin' for daylight."

"What's the idea?"

"Bob, you don't mean that, do you?" asked John Fann quickly. "Are you going to let every one——"

"He wants to show me to everybody," interrupted Barr. "Somebody better make him a banner to carry."

"Well—" John Fann shook his head—"I don't know what it is all about, but you're taking a big chance of having your prisoner taken away from you, Bob."

"Yeah, I s'pose," nodded Bob sadly. "This is the first man I ever arrested, and yuh hadn't ought to try and stop me from advertisin' it, John."

John Fann squinted closely at Bob. He knew Bob too well to accept such a shallow excuse. There was something beside vanity connected with bringing Barr Wyeth into Bunch Grass in daylight, but John Fann did not know what it was.

Ma Fann cleared away the dishes and food. On the shelf an old alarm clock ticked noisily. Each of the five people in the little kitchen was deep in his own thoughts. One of the babies cried fitfully and Ma Fann bustled out of the room. Barr Wyeth lifted his head and looked at his wife, but she was staring down at the table-cloth. He turned and looked at Bob Kern.

"It's goin' to be hard on them," he said softly, meaning the babies. There was no bitterness in his voice now.

Bob smiled softly and eased himself in his chair.

FOR half an hour the inhabitants of Bunch Grass carried water from all available wells, formed a bucket-brigade and did everything possible to save Doctor Knowles' office and home, but to no avail.

At five o'clock in the morning a cowboy, coming out of the Buck Horn, had seen the flames inside the house. Quickly he had sounded the alarm. The place was an inferno when enough men arrived to carry out Mellody, the wounded cowboy, who had been slightly scorched. The doctor's desk and a few pieces of furniture had been saved, but the rest of it went up in the flames that threatened to sweep the whole town.

No one knew the cause of the fire. Doctor Knowles swore that he had left no lamp burning, and at that time of the year there was no need of a fire, except for cooking purposes. Shortly after daylight the town began to fill up with people from the outlying districts, who made Saturday sort of a gala shopping day. They gazed upon the ruins, wished aloud that they had been there to see the blaze, and went on about their business.

As usual, Pastry Pell was much in evidence and told a graphic story of the fire. He had been drinking, and as a result the stories were totally different. Buck Kelly's trade started early, and the thirst-burdened cattlemen crowded the place to capacity.

It had been decided that Chet Gunning's funeral would be held that afternoon, and the conversation naturally turned to the excitement of the last few days. There was much argument over the robbery of John the Baptist, but that was secondary to the killing of the sheriff.

"And there ain't been nothin' done to lay the deadwood on Barr Wyeth either," declared "Butch" Fletcher, who owned the Flying-M outfit. "It's a —— of a note when a feller can shoot the sheriff and git plumb away without even havin' anybody on his trail."

"Been wires sent to every sheriff," said another cattleman, who was so badly cross-eyed that no one could ever tell in which direction he was looking.

"Might as well send 'em a Christmas present," grunted Butch. "Catch him and string him up, that's my motto."

Whisky began to percolate widely and it appeared that Chet Gunning was a blood-brother to every cow-man in the town. A few more drinks, and all they lived for was revenge.

It was about ten o'clock when a half-drunk cowboy floundered into the Buck Horn and blurted out news that sent every man in the place on a run for the door. Bob Kern was riding into town with Barr Wyeth, and just behind them came John the Baptist, Ma Fann and Nell Wyeth in a buggy.

Andy Allard saw them, too. He darted back to Splinter's cell, threw open the door and handed the surprized Splinter a Winchester rifle.

"C'm on!" he blurted. "What in ——'s the use of havin' a prisoner, if yuh don't use him?"

Splinter trotted out behind him and they raced up the street, shoving cartridges into the loading-gates of their rifles.

The crowd from the Buck Horn had swung out into the street, and almost surrounded Bob and Barr. Andy and Splinter shoved their way through and waved the crowd back.

Butch Fletcher shoved his way to the front.

"Yuh might as well cave in and let us have him," he declared. "It'll save trouble and expense."

Most of the crowd were half-drunk and Bob knew they were in a dangerous mood, but he only grinned and shook his head.

"Butch, yo're a four-flusher," he said slowly.

"The —— I am!" Butch snapped.

He turned and looked at those about him.

"Are we goin' to let him get away with this kinda stuff?"

"No!" yelled a voice at the rear of the crowd. "Git a rope!"

"That sounded like Pastry Pell," said Bob, standing up in his stirrups and peering over the crowd; but the owner of the voice had ducked.

"Well, whatcha goin' to do?" asked Andy impatiently. "I'm itchin' to ruin the census."

"You fellers want to lynch him, don't'cha?" queried Bob.

"We're goin' to lynch him," corrected Butch.

"Without givin' him a chance to tell his story?"

"What in —— story has he got to tell?" demanded Buck Kelly. "This is a dead open-and-shut case."

"Still, he's got a right to tell his side, ain't he?"

There were murmurs of approval.

"Let him tell it," agreed Butch. "We don't have to believe it, do we, Kern?"

"No," Bob shook his head. "I ain't askin' yuh to believe it—just to listen, Butch."

"All right, let him go ahead and tell us," agreed Butch.

Barr looked questioningly at Bob. He had no defense—nothing to tell that would help his case in any way. The crowd moved in closer and ranged in sort of a semi-circle, so that all might see and hear. Directly in front of Bob and Barr was Buck Kelly, Butch Fletcher, Mark Ells.

Pastry Pell had summoned up enough courage to shove his way to the front, and now he was at the edge of the circle to the right of the two mounted men.

Andy and Splinter still held their rifles ready for action and watched the crowd.

"Well, why in —— don't he talk?" asked one of the men. "He had so —— much to say, didn't he?"

"I know his story better than he does," said Bob slowly, "so he won't mind if I tell it for him. This story kinda dates back a little bit, gents. It starts with the stealin' of JHF cattle by a man who rides a horse that wears a bar-shoe. We found a yearling with the JHF blotted and the Lightnin' run on. That was Barr Wyeth's start."

"That's a good story," applauded a cowboy.

"Barr Wyeth hated John Fann," continued Bob, "and that was a good excuse for him to steal JHF cattle. Chet Gunnin' found out about the rustlin' and the word kinda got to Barr Wyeth. Naturally, he gets mad and declares war. He tries to kill John Fann with a bottle of hooch, but missed a bull's-eye by an inch.

"Barr Wyeth drank and gambled away his ranch to Buck Kelly, and he needs money goshawful bad. John Fann mortgages his ranch to Buck Kelly for eight thousand dollars and starts home with the money, when he gets shot with a forty-four bullet and robbed of his money.

"Barr Wyeth was in the cañon at that time, and the man who shot and robbed John Fann rode a horse that wore a bar-shoe. I know this, because I found where he had stood when he fired the shot and I trailed that bar-shoe over the rim of the cañon. Kinda looks like Barr Wyeth kept up the good work, don't it?"

The crowd grunted an approval. They were interested in this story, because the most of it was new to them.

"It must 'a' been Barr Wyeth," continued Bob. "There were only three men, Buck Kelly, Judge Freeman and John Fann who knew about the mortgage money. And I'll tell yuh why John Fann drew that money. It was to help Barr Wyeth pay off his debts.

"John Fann thought that Barr was stealin' cows to try and pay off his debts, and he was goin' to give Barr this money."

"How did Barr know that John Fann had this money?" asked Butch Fletcher.

"That's got me beat," grinned Bob, and looked at the blank face of his prisoner.

He turned and looked at the three people in the buggy. Nell Wyeth's face was very white and she turned away, a look of loathing for his apparently deliberate speech of accusation. Ma Fann tried to smile at Bob, but it was a pitiful attempt to show that she still had confidence in him.

"Then," said Bob, turning back to the crowd, "there comes the shootin' of Chet Gunnin'. I seen a lot of that. Barr Wyeth accused Gunnin' of havin' a hand in the robbin' of John Fann, but I don't *sabe* what he meant.

"Anyway, Barr dove out through the window, Chet rushes out through the door and starts shootin'. Somebody plugs him twice and he's dead."

Bob stopped and looked around at the circle of faces.

"Barr Wyeth shoots a forty-four Colt gun, gents; remember this. There's a certain party in Bunch Grass who delights in packin' lies. Mebbe he can't help it. Some folks can't, especially if they want to start a conversation. I mean Pastry Pell."

All eyes turned to Pastry, who tried to back into the crowd, but they closed ranks and stopped him.

"Yeah, he lied to Barr Wyeth about the JHF and he lied to the JHF about the Lightnin'. Now, we'll get back to the cattle rustlin'. Over five hundred head of the JHF stock has faded away, and that's some cows, gents. It's a man-sized job to dispose of that many cows. Yuh can't blot brands and get away with it. No sir, you've got to be slicker than that.

"It had me fightin' my head for a long time, but along comes a cowboy from Wyomin' and hands me the key. He's lookin' for the Ten-Bar-B outfit. Ever hear of it?"

The cattlemen shook their heads. It was not a known brand.

"I didn't *sabe* it," grinned Bob. "This puncher is looking for a job with that outfit. He said that the owner of that brand had driven a lot of stock over into Wyoming and sold 'em to the outfit he worked for. Sold 'em cheap, too. Said the range was burnt out over here.

"This was the same puncher that Splinter was supposed to have leaded up in a poker game."

"Supposed to?" queried Kelly. "Whatcha mean, Kern?"

"What I just said," replied Bob softly. "Splinter was too drunk to shoot anybody. Mellody had a bullet in him and there's one in the floor under the table, Buck. That bullet nicked Mellody's boot."

"Well, whatcha drivin' at?" asked Butch Fletcher.

"Here's what I mean," said Bob coldly. "Wyeth's horse that wore the bar-shoe has been dead a month. The shoes are still on its hoofs. Barr Wyeth is too wise to half-blot a JHF and smear on a Lightnin' brand. Somebody knew of the bar-shoe and they didn't know that Wyeth's horse was dead. They bungled the brand-blottin' to cover their own work."

"That's just yore idea, ain't it?" queried a cowboy.

"Yeah, that's right," smiled Bob, "but yuh must remember that a rider of a bar-shoe horse shot and robbed John Fann. Yes sir, and they shot him with a forty-four bullet, but—" Bob fumbled in his pocket and drew out the cartridge shell he had found near the cañon rim—"here's the shell of that cartridge. It's swelled so it won't fit a forty-four."

Bob held it up for them to see.

"Gents, that shell was fired from a forty-five gun!"

"What does that mean?" asked Kelly, a trifle nervously.

"Just that and nothin' more, Kelly," replied Bob. "I'm tellin' this tale as fast as I can. As I told yuh before, Barr Wyeth shoots a forty-four gun. The bullets that Doctor Knowles took out of Chet Gunnin' were forty-fives."

"The —— they were!" exploded Andy Allard. "I never knowed that."

"Here's what happened," explained Bob. "Somebody was just gettin' off their horse in front of the JHF ranchhouse when Chet busts out and starts shootin'. They just naturally shoots back at him. Barr Wyeth couldn't 'a' fired them shots."

"Well, who in —— did?" demanded Butch Fletcher.

"You'd accuse me of guessin', if I told yuh," grinned Bob, "but I'll tell yuh some more. This Mellody cowpuncher comes lookin' for the Ten-Bar-B outfit, of which there ain't no such an animal—not visible.

"Accordin' to Hoyle he ain't supposed to come here after that ghost-outfit, and there's certain folks who ain't noways in favor of his comin'. He gets drunk and sets into a poker game, gents. Then he turns his head and sees the owner of the Ten-Bar-B outfit coming in."

Bob eased back in his saddle and his muscles seemed to draw taut.

"Pastry Pell," he said slowly, "you stay where you are."

Bob's eyes drew down and he moved a trifle sideways in his saddle.

"Gents, the man who stole JHF cows; the man who shot and robbed John Fann; the man who killed Chet Gunnin' and the man who sold the Ten-Bar-B cows to the Wyomin' outfit is the same man. If you take the JHF brand, make an O out of the J, make the F into a B and draw a 1 in front of the O, you've got the Ten-Bar-B."

A murmur of astonishment came from the audience.

"By ——, that's right!" exploded Butch Fletcher. "Who——"

"And this Mellody got shot because he recognized him," gritted Bob. "There was two shots, gents. Splinter was so drunk that he never knew that they took his gun and fired it into the floor. The hole is there under the poker-table and there's a notch in Mellody's boot-sole."

"But who in —— was it?" panted Andy, never taking his eyes off the circle.

"A man who talked too much; a man who shoots a forty-five six-gun—our harmless friend, Pastry Pell!"

PASTRY PELL'S gun had always been a joke in the Bunch Grass country, but his joke-gun was only part of his harmless make-up. Swiftly as Bob Kern could draw, he would have been far too slow, but Andy was watching closely and fired the Winchester from his hip.

And almost over the spouting muzzle of that rifle, straight out of his saddle plunged Bob Kern, and his arms wrapped in a deathlike grip around the body of Buck Kelly. They crashed back into the crowd, just as Pastry Pell spun on his heel and went face-down, riddled with bullets from the Winchester.

The crowd dragged Bob and Buck to their feet, and Andy managed to snap handcuffs onto Buck's wrists.

"What did Buck have to do with it?" demanded Butch excitedly.

"He was the brains of it," panted Bob. "It took brains to figure that brand, Butch. I never suspicioned Buck until Mellody got shot. He shot Mellody because Mellody recognized Pastry as the owner of the Ten-Bar-B, and they knew the game was up."

Bob turned to Buck—

"Pastry set fire to Doc Knowles' house to try and get rid of Mellody, didn't he?"

"You know too —— much now!" snarled Kelly.

"Well, I reckon we'll just use the rope pronto," observed Butch. "No use delayin' this, is there, gents?"

"Wait a minute," said Bob. "I saved you fellers from doin' a —— bad job, didn't I? Well, let the law handle this case. There ain't any of yuh so —— perfect that you've got any right to hang a man."

"That's right," agreed a cowboy. "If yuh ever stop to assay yourself—eh, Bob?"

Barr Wyeth came pawing his way through the crowd and clapped Bob on the shoulder.

"I ain't got words enough to say what I want to, Bob. Pastry Pell lived long enough to tell me that everythin' you told 'em was true, and he said that Kelly always dealt a crooked game with me 'cause he wanted my ranch, and he told me that he had lied to me about you and John Fann. Kelly wanted to break the JHF and buy it cheap.

"But Pastry told us that Kelly had nothing to do with shootin' and robbin' of John Fann. He heard John and Kelly talkin' about it when he was washin' his face near the door of Kelly's office; so he thought he'd make a little money for himself. He thought it would help Kelly break the JHF."

"Yeah, and I —— near done it, too," mumbled Kelly. "But just to show yuh that I quit game, I'm givin' yuh back your notes, Wyeth. I don't reckon I'll have any use for a cattle ranch. Tear up John Fann's mortgage. Now put me in jail and call it a day."

Andy and several of the cowboys led him to the jail, while others picked up the remains of Pastry Pell and carried him into the Buck Horn.

John the Baptist, Ma Fann and Nell Wyeth were still sitting in the buggy in the middle of the street. Barr had walked over to them and now he was leaning on a wheel. None of them were talking, but all were watching Bob Kern who was still standing in the street, thinking it over.

"Bob Kern!" called Nell Wyeth.

Bob lifted his head and his serious expression faded into a broad grin. He went slowly over, patted the buggy horse and adjusted the bridle.

"Bob Kern, can you ever—" Nell

Wyeth's voice broke— "can you ever forgive me for what I've thought and said?"

"Why did you do this for us?" asked Barr hoarsely. "You knew we hated you, Kern. I don't understand."

"Well—" John Fann cleared his throat with difficulty— "Well, why don't you tell them, Bob?"

"I'll tell yuh," Bob grinned softly, as he rubbed the palm of his hand on the buggy-wheel, "I—I—John, you asked me to round-up all the JHF cattle, and I'm lazy as the dickens, and I didn't want to do it; so I stalled around, tryin' to keep from workin' and I couldn't help findin' out things.

"Yuh see, I wanted to come into town when there was a crowd; so that nobody would miss my oration. Tha'sall, I reckon. Laziness drove me to become a de-teck-i-tive."

Bob gave the wheel a final rub and turned away, going toward the sheriff's office.

"Bob!" called Ma Fann softly.

He stopped and looked back.

"Don't you know it is wrong to lie, Bob?"

Bob shuffled his toe in the dust and looked back at her seriously.

"Yes'm, Ma, it sure is. Liars don't never go to heaven."

He grinned widely and went on.

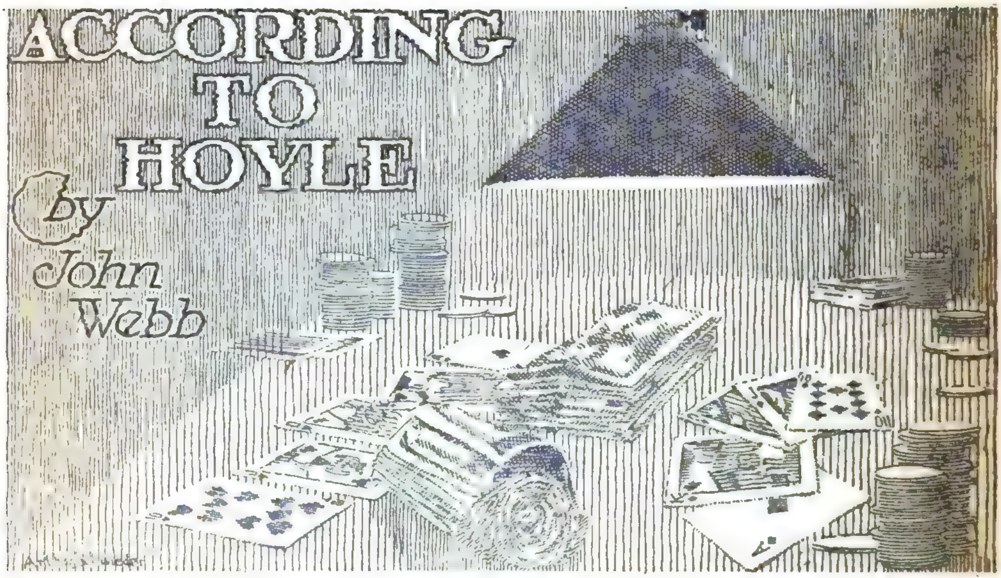
"If *he* don't," said Nell Wyeth softly, "it's because there's a better place than that."

John the Baptist picked up the lines and nodded his head.

"I reckon we better be goin' home. Get your horse, son."

"All right, dad," said Barr, and headed for the hitch-rack.

Bob Kern stood in the doorway of the office and saw them drive away, a look of unutterable sadness in his homely face. Then he shook his head, as if to drive away memories, and smiled softly to himself.



ACCORDING TO HOYLE

by John Webb

Author of "The Turn of the Wheel," "The Most Hated Men," etc.

ABEL LAWRENCE, vice-president and general manager of the Central American Steamship Company, looked across the big flat-topped desk at his son. It was in the elder Lawrence's private office on the main floor of a down-town New York office building. The time was early afternoon.

"So far your career has been that of a waster," the father was saying. "You have been of no use to me, to yourself, or to any one else. I do not blame you—I blame myself. It has been my fault. I have neglected your training. I gave you more money than was good for you, and left you to do with it as you willed. But that is past. I see my mistake and I hope you see yours. We will start over. I have been thinking that perhaps you would like to come into the company with me." It was a question.

The younger man nodded vigorously.

"Yes, dad, I would," he said. "I am tired of the life I've been leading—really, I am. I'm sick and tired of it—and I'm disgusted with myself. Give me a chance, and I'll do my best to make good."

"I have already decided to do that. I have made arrangements for you to go south on the *Hawk*. She sails tomorrow afternoon at three. We are selling some property in Limon. It is a strictly cash transaction, and I want you to handle the deal. I will explain it to you in detail later. In the meanwhile my secretary will prepare your credentials. You will go?"

"Yes, of course, dad—but, the *Hawk!*" His face was wobegone. "Why not the *Penguin*, or the *Albatross?*"

The two men stared across the desk at each other. The two vessels which young Lawrence had suggested were fine big passenger ships with grill-room, dance-floor, and orchestra, luxurious and fitted up in the most palatial style; the *Hawk* was a small, grimy freighter. The other man's eyes were twinkling.

Joseph Lawrence laughed outright.

"I see, dad," he said. "It's buckle down to work, now—eh? No more high-life for little Joseph. Well, I'm game. I'll go on a raft if you say so."

His father nodded approvingly.

"The *Hawk* is far from being a raft, son. She's small, and cranky, and—well, her quarters may not be just what you are used to—" he laughed with friendly sarcasm—"but, she's a man's ship. When you get to know her you'll like her. Captain McGuire has repeatedly refused to leave her for one of the passenger ships."

"Captain McGuire? Is he the famous 'One-Two Mac' I have heard so much about?"

"This is the man. And whatever you do, Joe, don't cross him. He's the toughest little shipmaster that ever trod a bridge; and he will not take a calling-down from the president. He's a good man to tie to, they say—although he isn't a very companionable sort of person—but he is a bad one to cross. We at the office don't get along any too well with Captain Mac—he is too sarcastic and too quick with his retorts—but he is a man. I could not point out to you a better example of square dealing and clean living. You will not like him, but you will admire him."

CAPTAIN McGUIRE, the dour little seaman whom many spoke of as "the last of the buckos," was sitting alone in his cabin when young Lawrence was brought to the door by the second mate. The young man introduced himself, shook hands, and handed his letter of introduction to the captain.

"Your father told me about you this morning," remarked the captain.

"Oh, did he? Poor father. I suppose he told you to be nice to me, and not to let me go astray."

"No, he did not—your father has more sense than that. He knows I wouldn't pay him any attention if he did."

Lawrence started. Captain Mac was just the sort his father had said he was. He recovered his composure and grinned.

"Well, he imagines, for some reason, that I can not look after myself, and he is always——"

"Can you?" asked the captain shortly.

Lawrence searched the deep black eyes for a hint of sarcasm, but there was only innocent inquiry in them.

"Well, I—"

"You are to be signed on as supercargo."

"Yes, captain. I am to be signed on as supercargo, but, of course, you understand that is only to cover the law. The law does not allow passengers to be carried on freight ships——"

"I know that!" cut in the captain.

"Then you understand that I am to be treated as, and given the privileges of, a pas——"

"You will be treated as, and given the privileges of, a supercargo.

"But I——"

"Your room is on the main deck."

It was a dismissal.

The main deck! As limited as was Lawrence's knowledge of ships he could imagine what a main-deck room on a freighter would be like. Day and night the steady pound of engines, the scrape of shovels and the banging of fire-box doors, the groaning of the ash hoist. And every four hours the jabbering and shouting and calling of the changing watches.

"Couldn't you do a little better than

that?" he asked. "How about one of these rooms under the bridge, captain, or——"

He was halted by the expression that came suddenly to the little shipmaster's face. It was a smile—a crooked, twisted smile that lifted up one corner of his mouth and drew down the other—a smile of derision. For sheer sarcasm it was the most graphic smile Lawrence had ever seen. He was amazed. And then the satiric leer went as quickly as it had appeared, and Captain Mac was himself, stony-face and sphinx-like.

"The supercargo's room is on the main deck," said the captain shortly, and he turned to his desk.

Lawrence was boiling with anger, but he determined to be game. He clenched his teeth on the angry words in his throat, turned and strode quickly from the room.

At three o'clock that afternoon the *Hawk* backed from her West Street dock out into the busy North River, straightened out and went down the channel on the beginning of the three months voyage to West Indian and Central American ports. Lawrence, in order to have some knowledge of the port facilities and conditions prevailing in the tropical ports, was to make the entire trip.

At five o'clock, just after departure had been taken from Scotland light-ship, the room-steward came to the door of Lawrence's room and told him dinner was ready. He arose and followed the man to the officer's saloon.

In the saloon was a rectangular table with six chairs bolted to the floor about it; one at each end and two at each side. Four of the chairs were occupied; the captain was at the head of the table, the chief engineer opposite, and at the captain's left were the second and third mates.

Whenever, while on one of his pleasure trips, Lawrence had traveled on the *Penguin* or the *Albatross*, he had always, as the vice-president's son, had the seat of honor at the captain's right. So it was only natural for the young man to suppose that now, on the *Hawk*, the same seat had been reserved for him. He made for the vacant seat at the captain's right, and after nodding to those present—the second mate had introduced him to the officers of the ship earlier in the afternoon—sat down.

"Mr. Lawrence," said the captain quietly, "you will take the next seat, please. You are sitting in Mr. Tenny's seat; he is on watch. Aboard ship—" he emphasized it—"a supercargo ranks *after* the officers."

"My mistake," said Lawrence shortly, and he moved to the next chair.

"A natural one," said Captain Mac.

Although the little man's tone had been inoffensive Lawrence felt that he had been rebuked. It was the very inoffensiveness of the captain's manner that was so grating. He had spoken to Lawrence in the manner of one who is explaining something to a child. The young man's long cherished feeling of superiority over the employees of his father's company was being trodden underfoot, and already he had take an intense and unreasoning dislike to the master of the *Hawk*. And he felt sure that the captain disliked him.

THEY put in to Port au Prince, discharged a considerable amount of cargo, and then steamed across the Caribbean to Limon.

In the afternoon of the day of the *Hawk's* arrival in Limon something happened which increased Lawrence's misunderstanding of the character of the master.

The ship had been in port only five hours, but that had been long enough for some of the crew to slip ashore and fill up on native rum. They were swaggering back now in two and threes and, made bold and reckless by the fiery liquid, they seemed to care very little whether or not they were seen by the vessel's officers.

Lawrence was at the gangway, about to go ashore, when a big, powerful man, his hands grimy and his eyes rimmed with coal dust, came up, brushed by him, and swaggered aft along the main deck. Captain McGuire was standing beneath the bridge, and when the man passed the master turned and looked at him.

"Here," called the captain, "who are you."

The man turned and looked down at him.

"Fireman," he growled.

"Where have you been?"

"Me?" He thrust forward his chin pugnaciously. "Why, I been ashore."

"During working hours?" The captain's tone was calm, almost casual. "And you have so much rum in you that you don't care who sees you."

"No, cap'n I don't give a —— who sees me."

"Well, the next time you sneak ashore,

sneak back. I don't want you to parade your drunkenness before my eyes."

The man's eyes flamed with anger.

"Look 'ere, Cap'n One-Two Mac, you cut that stuff—d'yuh 'ere! I didn't *sneak* ashore—and I'll come back like I please. And another thing—I ain't drunk!"

He wasn't drunk. As a matter of fact, he was in that dangerous intermediate stage where a man is master of his body but not of his head.

Lawrence, prompted by his interest, left the gangway and went toward them. The chief engineer came from across the deck and "stood by." The fireman was an enormous man, barrel-chested and with the shoulders of an ox, and the chief, evidently expecting trouble, looked about for a weapon.

"An' if yuh don't like me coming up yer gangway I'll go down again—I don't have to stay on yer —— ship."

"Yes, you do," said Captain Mac. "You do now."

He was backing slowly toward the gangway—to avoid the advance of the towering fireman, Lawrence thought. The man was fast working himself into a fury, and he looked dangerous, and the supercargo could not blame the little shipmaster for retreating.

"I don't, I tell yuh! An' I'm not gonna. I'm gonna go ashore again—an' before I go I'm gonna smash that —— sneerin' map o' yourn'."

The man increased his speed toward the captain, who was still backing.

The chief, himself a big man, sprang forward and grappled with the fireman, but he was flung roughly aside by a single sweep of one of the massive arms. The fireman, further infuriated by the interference, lowered his head, bull-like, and rushed at Captain Mac.

Fist fighting had always been abhorrent to Lawrence. He had been raised in a more genteel atmosphere than that of the sea. In his set men settled their differences by more subtle methods. It was vulgar and stupid to resort to fists, he thought. He had never been able to understand why some men did it. The volley of epithets followed by the thud of fists, the struggling of fight-mad men; such things were foreign to his temperament. He was sure of that. During college he had played football, but during the hottest moments there had always been a spirit of friendly competition—of good fellowship. Never before had he seen the ferocity, the hatred, he now saw in the face of the big fireman.

But there was in the boy something of the spirit of his father; something of the fighting blood that had carried the elder Lawrence from deck-hand to vice-president of a steamship company. There was a small man being attacked by a big one, and Joseph Lawrence, propelled by the spirit that had so long lain dormant within him, the spirit of his fighting father which had survived his own built-up ideas on breeding and refinement, threw himself at the oncoming fireman.

Lawrence hit out as he had been taught to do by his boxing instructor, a straight blow from the shoulder that landed cleanly on the man's heavy jaw, but he might just as well have hit the side of the ship. He was bowled over like a nine-pin, and the fireman went on over his prostrate body with hardly a pause. Lawrence, dizzy, but full of fight, got to his feet and staggered after.

Captain Mac went down before the fireman's rush seemingly as easily as had Lawrence, but in reality there was a difference. The captain *threw himself* backward a fraction of a second before the man reached him, while the ham-like hands were clutching for him, and when he went down he had a firm grip of the big man's coat collar.

Captain Mac—or "One-Two Mac" in time of strife—still holding the collar of the man's coat, pulling him with him, went flat on his back, and his legs came up to a position at right angles to his body. He thrust up with all the power of his wiry leg muscles, and his feet thudded squarely into the pit of the fireman's stomach. His own momentum increased by the lift of the captain's legs, the big fireman cart-wheeled into the air and landed with a crash upon the deck. He was "out."

The captain arose leisurely. He was not the least bit angry or excited, and, with the exception of the dirt upon his back, there was no evidence that he had been in a fight. While he was brushing himself off he was gazing speculatively at Lawrence.

"Your mistake again," he said at length. "Never hit a fellow like him in the jaw. You couldn't hurt his jaw with a capstan bar. They drink a lot, you see, and the rum rots their insides. It takes only a tap on the waist-line to stop a hard drinker—this fellow will be sick for a week. Anyway, why did you do it?"

"I thought it was the proper thing to do. He is so big, and you are so—so much smaller. I didn't know you were so capable."

"You did not think you could lick him, did you?"

"No-o," Lawrence shook his head. "I—well, I just dove in."

"H'm." The captain's eyes were very thoughtful, and there was a peculiar reminiscent light in them. "Your father, 'Rough-house' Lawrence, would have done that."

Rough-house Lawrence! Always before, when he had heard that uncouth cognomen Lawrence had shivered with aversion, but now, for some reason not clear to himself, he felt rather proud to know that his father, in his day, had been considered "rough."

Captain Mac's expression was almost kindly, something very rare for "the last of the buckos." His thoughts were back twenty years into the past, when he and Rough-house Lawrence had been shipmates.

"Yes," said Captain Mac slowly, nodding, "old Rough-house would have done that too. Only he would have made a better job of it—he would have stopped that fellow."

Somehow, in unknowingly emulating his father, young Lawrence felt that he had done a commendable thing. For the first time in his life he was proud of his father's reputation for roughness.

THE next afternoon Lawrence, dressed to go ashore, was about to pass Captain Mac on the main deck when the little man stopped him.

"Going ashore?" asked the captain casually.

"Yes," answered Lawrence. "I have some business to do here for the firm, you know. I made the preliminary arrangements yesterday and I expect to close the deal today or tomorrow."

"Mr. Tenny mentioned that he saw you last night in the American Club," remarked Captain Mac. "You were with Edwards?"

"Yes—Edwards introduced himself to me and then introduced me around to the other fellows. Pleasant chap—isn't he?"

"He's a gambler."

"Well, I guess he does play occasionally. They all do."

"But Edwards is a professional. He's a crook."

Lawrence raised his eye-brows.

"That is going pretty far—isn't it captain?"

"It's the truth."

"Well, he seemed a perfect gentleman to me, and until he shows himself to be otherwise——"

Lawrence shrugged his shoulders. He felt that Captain Mac had overstepped the bounds of propriety, and he was a bit irritated.

"That's right."

Captain McGuire turned away, as if to end the subject, but, evidently changing his mind, he turned back.

"By the way, isn't this deal a cash transaction?"

"Yes, it is."

"Well, when you have the money in your pocket, don't let Edwards induce you to play with him. In fact, I advise you to come straight to the ship and let me put it in the safe."

"Nonsense, captain. Do you think me a child? I have played poker for years, and have always been able to take care of myself. I——"

Then the full purport of Captain Mac's words came to him. He had been insulted! With livid face and clenched hands he pressed close to the little captain.

"What do you mean? Are you insinuating that I would gamble with money belonging to the company? You are insulting! You must——"

Captain Mac had turned and walked swiftly away.

IT WAS after midnight when Lawrence returned from ashore, and he did not see Captain Mac. He met him, however, at breakfast.

"Mr. Lawrence, are you going to clear up your business today?" the captain asked.

"Yes, this afternoon," Lawrence answered.

"We sail at noon tomorrow," the captain told him.

Lawrence went ashore after lunch and did not return for dinner. At ten o'clock that night he was still absent.

Captain Mac was upon the bridge when the second mate, just returned from ashore, came by on his way to his room. The captain stopped him.

"How are things in town, Mr. Scott?" asked the captain.

Scott stopped with his face showing his surprize. Pleasantry from Captain McGuire was unusual, to say the least.

"Pretty tough for me, captain. I lost twelve bucks in a poker game."

"That so?"

Captain Mac shook his head sympathetically.

"Yes. I gave 'em quite a tussle for it though. I was playing with Lawrence, 'Fan' Edwards, and a friend of his named Brown. I know Edwards is a crook, but I figured on keeping an eye on him. Anyway, I got twelve dollars worth of experience." He laughed.

"Where did you meet Lawrence?" the captain asked.

"Oh, I didn't meet him until seven o'clock. He had some business to do in the afternoon, and he met me at the club. We had dinner together, and then Edwards came along and suggested a game of poker. The game was getting too steep, and I wanted Lawrence to quit when I did, but he wouldn't. They're playing in room twenty-four, at the club. Lawrence was holding his own when I left, but they'll trim him if he don't watch out. He probably hasn't much money with him though."

"H'm," said Captain Mac.

Scott yawned sleepily, and with a "Good night, captain," passed on to his room.

Captain Mac stood awhile upon the bridge, looking off toward the lights of the town, then he turned abruptly and went into the room, next to his sleeping-room, which he used as an office. He switched on the shaded electric bulb and turned it so that the rays were reflected upon a small, framed picture which hung above his desk.

The picture, although evidently an old one, was but slightly faded. It was a photograph of a group of men, seamen, upon the forecastle-head of a sailing vessel—a bark, as could be told by the rigging in the background. In the foreground, their faces still distinguishable, were two young men. One was a sturdy, aggressive-chinned man with a frank, fearless countenance; the other, apparently the younger, was a slender youth with hard eyes and a straight mouth, and the camera had caught him with one corner of his mouth slightly lifted in a peculiar smile. The stockily built man had one hand resting in a friendly manner upon the other's shoulder. They were shipmates—One-Two Mac and Rough-house Lawrence—and the picture had been taken on the old *Shenandoah*, twenty-five years before.

Captain Mac stared at the picture long and earnestly, then he took his limp Panama hat from the desk top and went out.

THE night clerk at the American Club was surprized when Captain McGuire, the solitary, morose sea captain who was noted for never leaving his ship except on business, came in and asked for a room.

"I thought you always preferred to sleep aboard ship, captain," said the clerk conversationally.

"I do, as a rule," said Captain Mac. "But it's hot aboard tonight. Wind has shifted around behind the pier. Room's full of mosquitos, too. How about room twenty-four? Mr. Scott was telling me that it is a good cool one."

"Twenty-four?—twenty-four is taken, but I can give you one just as——"

"What is the number of the room next to it?"

"Twenty-two and twenty-six, but——"

"Twenty-two will do. It's cool, isn't it?"

"As cool as any, I guess. Unless you want one of the third-floor rooms.

"No—twenty-two will do. Let me have the key and I'll go right up."

FAN EDWARDS was dealing, and the cards slipped from his nimble fingers like a shower of falling leaves. The deal finished, he slapped the remainder of the deck upon the table and leaned back.

Lawrence, sitting at Edwards' right, picked up his cards slowly, one by one, and when he had the last card in his hand his surprize and joy were so poorly concealed that Edwards, watching out of the corners of his eyes, smiled slyly.

Lawrence shuffled his five cards, held them face down for a moment, and then looked at them again. His first glance had told him the truth. He held a "pat" hand —an unbeatable one; a royal flush! It was a combination which many players waited a lifetime for. It was the first he had ever seen, and he tried to still the thumping of his heart and appear casual.

Brown, lounging nonchalantly in his chair across from Lawrence, opened, and Lawrence and Edwards shoved in their chips to draw cards.

"I'm splitting my openers," said Brown, and he took one card from his hand and layed it face down upon the table.

Brown drew one card, Lawrence stood pat, and Edwards gave himself two.

"It's getting late," said Brown, and he yawned heavily behind his hand. "I'm betting twenty-five."

"And twenty-five better," said Lawrence quickly—too quickly, he realized a moment later.

"Whew!" Edwards looked at the other two as if surprized. "This is no place for three little ones."

He threw his cards in the discard.

"I'm going to boost it again."

Brown shoved in his chips and looked across the table at Lawrence.

"And again," said Lawrence.

They both raised it again, then sat back and looked at one another.

"Somebody's due for a bump," remarked Edwards. "I guess I got out while the getting was good."

The two both raised again.

"It's getting late," Brown said, for the second time, "and—say, what d'you say we bring this thing to a show-down? No use of us piking away all night. Let's bet something worth while."

Lawrence nodded.

"All right," he said. "Let's see—I've about three hundred and——"

"Aw, ——!" broke in Brown. "Make it worth while, I said."

He took a roll of bills from his pocket and slapped it down on the table.

"There's seven thousand dollars there—count it. I'm betting that on these five cards. And I guess I can scout up a couple thousand more if you ain't satisfied."

Lawrence gasped, and with the blood racing through his veins, stared at the roll of bills. Seven thousand dollars—and more! He thought of the nine thousand dollars of the company's money which he had in an envelope in his pocket. It would not be stealing; he would only need it for a few minutes. He couldn't lose; couldn't go wrong on a royal flush. It wasn't a gamble; it was a sure-thing investment. If his father were there he knew he would agree with him.

Here was a situation which poker players dreamed of; a royal flush with at least one good hand against it—and money in the game! Opportunity was knocking—he would never forgive himself should he let it pass unheeded. Here was a story to tell over and over again at the club—if he played his part.

Brown's eyes kindled as Lawrence took from his pocket an envelope with the yellow and green of protruding bank notes. Edwards stared complacently at the pile of chips in the center of the table, but the nerves of his face were twitching.

"Is nine thousand too steep for you?" asked Lawrence as calmly as he could.

"I don't think so."

Brown turned to Edwards.

"Am I good for two thousand, Fan?"

Edwards seemed inclined to laugh, but he controlled himself. Lawrence was too excited to notice.

"Sure."

Edwards counted out the money with a slowness which, to Lawrence, was exasperating.

"What was that!" Edwards exclaimed, and he half arose from his chair.

"What was what?" Brown looked at him questioningly.

"In the next room. Sounded like somebody moving around."

"Well, let 'em move," said Brown, impatient at the interruption. "Walls in this dump are so thin you can hear the fellow next door when he takes a full breath."

Lawrence was so intent on his cards that he failed to gather the significance of Edwards's alarm. He looked at his hand again—they were still there; the ace, king, queen, jack, and ten of diamonds.

"There you are," Brown said. "Nine thousand bucks. And may the best man win. Let's look at 'em!"

Lawrence spread his cards face up upon the table—a royal flush in diamonds.

Brown put down his—a royal flush in hearts!

"Well!" Brown portrayed surprize. "Well! Can you beat that! Two royals on one deal."

"Gosh!"

Lawrence stared, dumfounded.

Brown tried to look sympathetic, and almost succeeded.

"Too bad, too bad," he said. "With a hand like that you deserved to win. Too bad."

Brown began drawing the money toward him.

"Here! What do you mean?" Lawrence reached out and stopped him. "The hands are equal."

"What?" Brown leaned forward with amazement written all over his crafty countenance. "Why—why—do you mean that?"

"Yes—aren't they equal?"

"Gee!" Brown shook his head pityingly. "I thought everybody knew better than that. Leave it to Edwards."

Edwards tried to look unconcerned.

"I would rather stay out of it," he said. "You're both friends of mine, and I don't want to cause any hard feelings."

"But hearts beat diamonds," exclaimed Brown heatedly. "Anybody knows that."

"I *have* heard that," stammered Lawrence, "but I'm not sure— I——"

A terrible fear was gnawing into his breast. His breathing was labored and his body was bathed in cold perspiration.

Brown's fingers were edging toward the money.

"Well, somebody's got to decide it," he said. "I'm not gonna give up money I won just because you don't know the rules of the game. Let Edwards explain it to you."

Lawrence looked appealingly at Edwards.

"He's right," the gambler said, nodding at Brown. "Hearts win. I haven't got a 'Book of Hoyle'—in fact, there's none in the club—but I happen to remember the rule almost word for word. It goes like this: 'In case of two or more flushes, or straight flushes, being equal in denominations, the winning hand shall be decided by the suits, which rank as follows—hearts, spades, diamonds, clubs, in the order named.' It also says there is no such thing as a tie in poker."

Hearts were the highest suit! Lawrence remembered having heard that said before. He was stunned by the blow, and he sat helpless while Brown was gathering up the money.

"Too bad," said Brown. "But I got to take your money—just like you'd have taken mine. Sorry, but——"

"You need not be sorry," said a quiet voice from the doorway, "because you're going to give it back."

The three turned together and stared at the black-haired, black-eyed little man who stood in the entrance. His manner was mild and he seemed on the point of apologizing. Only in the cold, bleak, metallic voice was there menace.

Captain Mac advanced into the room, holding Brown with his eyes as he came, and before any of the three had recovered from their surprize he had the money in his hand.

"I was listening," he explained to them. "In the next room—through the walls that are so thin that you can hear the fellow next door taking a full breath."

"Here—" Captain Mac tossed the bundle of money to Lawrence—"divide that exactly in two."

"But—" Lawrence stared stupidly—"he won it fair—it's Brown's."

"Divide it!"

It was a command; the words were like the crack of a whip, and Lawrence began, with trembling fingers, to divide the money.

"Who is banker of this game?"

Captain Mac looked from Brown to Edwards, and, as his eyes fell upon the latter, he started in mock surprize.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "If it isn't Fan Edwards! I haven't seen you since that night in Baranquilla—remember?—when an ace caught in your coat-sleeve and I had to help you get it out? Those were the days. Remember how you used to 'fan' good hands all around the board—and how you used to get hands that were just a bit better than the others?"

Edwards, his face ashen, said nothing, but sat with his fingers gripping the table edge so tightly that the knuckles were white with the strain.

"Here! What the —— do you call this?" snarled Brown. "That's my dough, an' I want it."

He reached across the table, but the little captain shoved him back.

"Cut it, Brown, cut it!" warned Edwards quickly. "That's One-Two Mac."

"I don't give a —— if he's the —— himself—he ain't gonna take my dough."

Brown sprang forward, one arm swinging, as if to brush the little seaman to one side.

Captain Mac, without moving his feet, twisted his body to one side so that Brown's swinging arm grazed his shoulder, then his right hand flashed upward and backward in the most damaging blow known to fighting men—a blow to the Adam's apple. His hand was held open and palm downward, and the edge of it caught Brown in the throat.

Brown's mouth opened in pain, and he staggered, then he sank to the floor and lay writhing in agony, clutching his throat with both hands and coughing.

Lawrence started up to go to the aid of the injured man, but Captain Mac pushed him back in his chair.

"You can't help him," he said. "Let him alone, and he'll come out of it in a few minutes. Is that money split in two yet?"

The captain gathered the chips in a pile and shoved them across the table to Edwards.

"You're the bank, aren't you?" he asked.

The gambler nodded.

"Cash these chips then."

Edwards obeyed in haste.

Captain Mac divided the proceeds from the chips and placed one-half on the table in front of where Brown had been sitting. He then took half of the money Lawrence had just finished dividing and placed that in the same place before Brown's chair. The remainder of the money he motioned to Lawrence to pick up.

"Put that in your pocket," he said.

Captain Mac looked about approvingly; at the two royal flushes, laying face up, and at the evenly divided money.

"Every thing is as it should be," he said.

"Like —— it is!" growled Edwards under his breath.

"As it should be," repeated Captain Mac. "And according to Hoyle."

TWENTY minutes later the two were aboard the *Hawk*. They stopped beneath the bridge and looked at each other.

"I'm an idiot, Captain Mac," said Lawrence, "—and more."

It was the first he had spoken since leaving the American Club.

"You should always know the game you are playing," said the captain. "I believe Mr. Scott has a book of rules for card games—you should ask him to let you see it."

"I did not mean just that. I should have followed your advice."

"That's over and past," said Captain Mac. "Edwards or Brown won't tell, and neither will you or I."

Lawrence breathed a sigh of relief and looked at the little man gratefully.

"When you get back to New York, and you have that nice little private office your father said he was going to give you——"

Captain Mac stopped and looked at the young man narrowly.

Lawrence shook his head.

"I don't want a private office," he said. "Captain Mac, I'm thinking of that 'know the game you're playing.' You can't know it by beginning at the top—can you? Now, I was thinking that if I could get a job as, say, quartermaster, on the *Hawk*, with you —er—how long would it be before I could get my third mate's papers—and then my second's, and my——"

He looked hopefully at the little captain.

"Do you mean to say you would give up a nice little office for that?"

"To —— with the nice little office! I want to know this game backward, forward, and inside out."

Captain McGuire turned away and started for the bridge ladder. At the foot he turned.

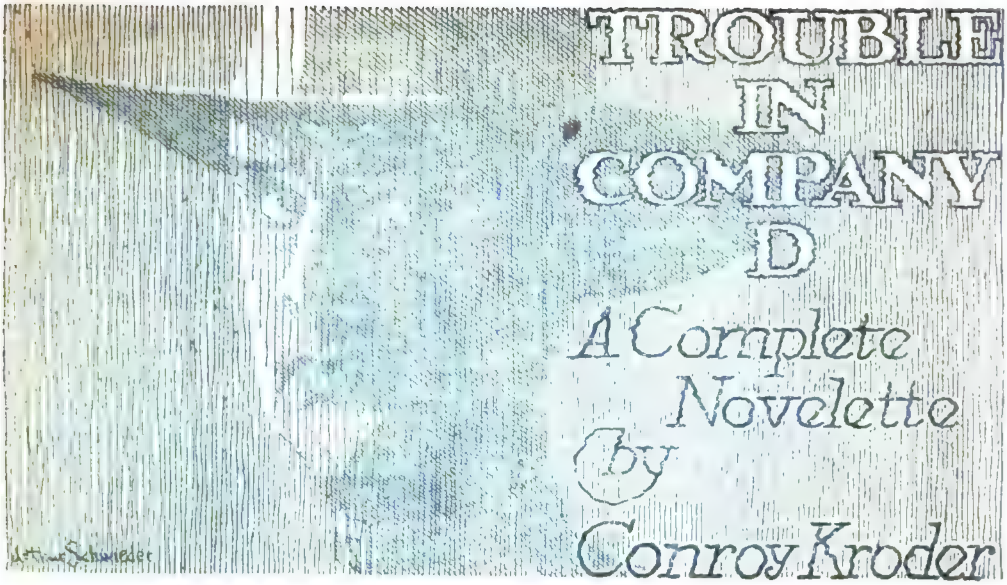
"That's what old Rough-house would have said," he called back.

Slants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

Jobs

IT'S A *responsible* job. I adore responsibility. I love packing a load; but one must do the thing right. I think that a man who fears to carry a weight of responsibility upon his shoulders, absolutely all to himself, and to do it joyously, is falling down a little in his manhood. I think that the greatest thing—one of them—there are so many great things—is to be able to feel the joy of having a load stuck upon your shoulders that you know is too much for you—and then set your teeth, dig your toes in, and off up the high hill trail—load and all. It's the very —— of a job, but it has fine compensations.



TROUBLE IN COMPANY D

A Complete Novelette

by

Conroy Kroder

Author of "The Ghost Intrigue"

WHEN Company D was sent south from Cagayan, Mindanao, to watch, listen, make maps and possibly fight, the cogon-grass was green and ankle-high, and affable, easy-going Lieutenant Bagler thought "Camp Meadows" a suitable name for the level clearing where he had been ordered to pitch tents.

Now Lieutenant Bagler was gone, the cogon was seven feet of tangled yellow viciousness, and Camp Meadows had become "Camp Mad'ouse" by an ironic twist of every enlisted man's tongue. This was unfortunate, since discord and inefficiency are blood brothers, and Company D might have serious work to do.

Underneath a friendly surface the hundred thousand Visayans round about quivered with uncertainty. What and where concealed, queried even the *amigos* among them, was the trick beneath the American proposal to give them self-rule and protect them while they were learning to use it?

To the south, the hard-bitten Mohammedan Malanaos entertained like suspicions, but with no uncertainty of attitude commingled. Whether the Americans were tricky tyrants or liberating fools, their continued rule meant an end to the sacred right of the Malanaos to enslave, tax, rob and otherwise use the Visayans to the Malanao advantage and the consequent glory of Allah. The Malanaos had so far refrained from striking because they still hoped to convince the Visayans, by tricks or argument, that the pork-eating white infidels were treacherous liars as well, whose promise meant nothing, and so enlist the Visayans on the Malanao side.

So Company D, well down toward Moroland, was webbed about by intrigue of which it knew little and cared in the main considerably less. It had its own troubles. It sweltered in its forty-eight tents, hiked, drilled, pulled grass and lately talked mutiny. Recruits predominated—"even in headquarters tent," said one old-timer.

In headquarters tent sat this morning that particular "recruit" the old-timer referred to—Lieutenant Lockard, Company D's one lonely officer. Long and weedy of body, with round, boyish features, studious eyes and smooth cheeks whose pinkness was not yet overlaid by tropic tan, he looked, in truth, a very young campaigner.

He was holding office hours. Before him stood Private Hubbell, all too rigidly at attention. From his own makeshift desk Acting First Sergeant Rodman looked on, oddly intent. Even a trifle worried.

"You are reported absent from reveille roll-call this morning," said Lieutenant Lockard in his most impersonal and formal voice. "What have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothing, sir!" In military formality

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of tone the private's voice matched the lieutenant's. But in other, involuntary ways the private was expressing his feelings plainly enough.

By his carriage and the hang of his arms, every muscle of his youthful, well-formed body was tense with anger. His sensitive, finely cut, ordinarily ruddy face was just now white beneath its tan and rigid beneath its whiteness. And in his eyes, held "straight to the front" according to the formula of "attention," burned pure hatred.

Lieutenant Lockard eyed him for a moment, coolly thoughtful, very carefully impersonal—in outward appearance at least. Really he was somewhat troubled. He could not well help that, knowing that Private Hubbell's attitude was only an advanced form of the spirit which pervaded his whole command. And still, what was there to do but——

"This is your third offense since I have taken command," he said coldly. "Three offenses within a month. Only eight days ago you fell out without proper equipment; and ten days before that, on a practise march, you went swimming in the Pulangui River without permission. Have you any excuse at all to offer?"

"No, sir."

"Another thing. Each time you've come before me, I've noticed a certain defiance in your manner that approaches insubordination. In fact, you seem to bear that manner about with you continually. Now that is subversive of discipline and must stop. I know you are a recruit, but I'm not going to consider that any longer as an excuse. Consequently I'm going to give you ten days' confinement in your tent when not on duty. And ten hours E. P. D. And I hope——"

At that a slight, derisive smile, hardly perceptible, just stirred the rigid muscles of the private's face. So slight a smile was it that the private could hardly be called to account for it. Still the lieutenant's voice broke off in a sort of flurry of anger, caused mainly by a sudden intuition that he himself—and consequently his uniform—was being made the subject of some hidden jest.

At about the same instant Sergeant Rodman, who had suddenly become very busy with some papers on his desk, looked up shamefacedly and blurted out—

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Well, what is it?"

"I—I am sorry, sir, but there seems to have been a mistake. In the morning roll-call. The sergeant of the guard's report shows Private Hubbell on post between five and seven this morning. So he couldn't have answered reveille roll-call." The lieutenant lost his composure for a moment.

"Is that true?" he snapped at Hubbell.

"Yes, sir," in an unchanged voice.

"Why didn't you say so in the first place?" Puzzlement as well as anger was in the lieutenant's voice.

"I have nothing to say, sir."

The lieutenant's loss of temper, as well as the mistake, had given the private a decided advantage. The officer felt this keenly. Finally he said coldly:

"Very well. Punishment remitted. You may go."

Private Hubbell, saluted perfectly, held the salute until it was returned, about-faced, and marched out of the tent. As he opened the flap a blaze of sunlight came in, hot as the flare of an actual flame. And with it, the words of a certain ribald song, the air of which had for some minutes been rasping the officer's ears—

"Oh, whin ye meet our new off-i-cer,
Stand at salute and say, 'Yis, sir,'
Hands at yer side, ye awkward lout,
Belly sucked in and chest stuck out,

"For he's the downy-faced *teniente*,
Commander-in-chief of a whole company."

The flap fell again. The words of the song became again indistinguishable, but evidently another stanza followed. Lieutenant Lockard jerked angrily around.

"Oh, sergeant!" he called testily.

Sergeant Rodman got up quickly, and, crossing the tent, came to attention before the lieutenant's desk. Rodman was a big man, lean, hard, and even a little more erect than prescribed by regulations. Besides his sergeant's chevrons he wore four service stripes. His middle-aged, soldierly face, strong and perhaps a little passionate, was seamed by many lines.

"That mistake was very unfortunate," said Lieutenant Lockard. "Such mistakes are always unfortunate. They impair discipline. I wish you would avoid them."

Sergeant Rodman did not even meditate excusing himself with the fact that the morning roll-call was the work of the private detailed as company clerk. *He* was first sergeant.

"Very well, sir," he replied formally.

He waited impassively for his dismissal, still standing at attention; but the lieutenant continued to toy with his pen. Finally he looked up with the air of a man who has come to a decision.

"In fact, there is a great deal about your work that is unsatisfactory. I mean, unsatisfactory in its results, which is the only test. The morale of the company is very poor. You've been acting first sergeant for six months, ever since its organization, and I think you must be held very largely responsible." The lieutenant paused.

"Very likely, sir," Sergeant Rodman agreed, his face expressionless as a mask.

The lieutenant frowned impatiently and could not have explained why. He collected his thoughts.

"Of course, it's not all your fault. In fact——"

He pursed his lips, refusing to go any further—realizing indeed that he could not go any further with an enlisted man. So he gave the sergeant his dismissal.

"That's all. Only I'll expect stronger cooperation from you in the future. Now post your guard detail. Police the camp."

"Very good, sir."

In his turn the sergeant saluted, about-faced and left the tent. Outside he tried a smile, but anger changed it into a grimace. He had the professional pride of all non-coms who are worth the thread in their chevrons—maybe a little more than his share!—and this was not the first time it had been trampled by the lieutenant.

"The darn shavetail!" he muttered, clamping the guard detail on the bulletin board. "Good Lord! We got along all right before he came here."

Then he turned, facing down the company street and trumpeted out:

"Outside for police work! Everybody out! *Shake a leg!*"

Though he knew they were not for him, he frowned at the storm of hisses and catcalls that instantly broke from the tents. A month ago he would have done more than frown, more than grumble worriedly under his breath:

"The blame gumboots! Well, if they don't do worse——"

Really the place itself would have tried men's souls without the factor of a disliked C. O. The white-hot sun was not yet high, but the air was already quivering in torment under its burning rays. The circular stubble around the camp and the waveless cogon beyond, flung back those rays from their brass-colored, motionless surfaces.

In the distance, to the south and east, the swale of cogon merged into a jungle, above which the tall, straight trunks of bamboo, topped by tufts of great, flat leaves, reached motionlessly up toward the hot sky. North and south the foot-hills of the Rangayan Mountains piled up to a lofty horizon, black and jagged, forbidding and menacing. It seemed that under the very weight of these alien immensities the spirits of many of the men must become crushed, deformed.

SO INDEED they had been at times until the men hated themselves and each other. But there was nothing of this as they came out of their tents this morning—rather an odd alertness, a strange, keen excitement. Noticing this, Rodman's frown deepened.

"Now what? Suppose that mango peddler— Good Lord, if he has——"

He started toward one of the tents, from which was coming another stanza of the mutinous song, bellowed untunefully in a reckless voice Sergeant Rodman knew well:

"It's work in the morn, scrub-and-wash-clothes at night;
It's drill 'em and mill 'em and teach 'em to fight.
And who is the foe that I'd like well to see
At the end of me fist?—That *teniente!*

"Who is he, who is he, oh, who is he?
Commander-in-chief of Company D."

"Now you better cut that out," said Rodman, not ill-naturedly, as he stopped in front of the tent. "And get out to work."

Instantly the singing stopped, and big "Carabao" Wilson, who sported five "hash marks" on his private's sleeve, came out of the tent, grinning.

"That's goin' a bit too far, Carabao. But speakin' of singin', if that's what you call it, d'ye ever hear Hubbell chortlin' any of that safety-valve stuff?" On Carabao's flaming red, dare-devil face the grin widened.

"Hubbell! Not much! Why, he takes the shavetail serious, you know."

"He seems to. You know what he was goin' to do this mornin'? Take ten days confinement and ten hours E. P. D. before he'd do a bit of explainin'. He hates the lieutenant that much." Carabao's forehead wrinkled in pretended disbelief.

"Eh? I don't get that."

"Oh, the dickens; yes, you do! You've seen 'em go that way before, and so've I. When a darn rookie gets to sulkin', there ain't any tellin' what he'll do. Only he's dead sure to explode someway. If you get a chance to kid him along a little, or any of the others, I'd appreciate it. Keep 'em from goin' off their nut. You know I'm doin' all I can."

"All right, sarge; I'll be a wet nurse if you say so. And I guess——"

Carabao hesitated, looking dubiously at the men who were scattered about the company street, picking up bits of grass from the ground. Then he stepped back into his tent and jerked his head for the sergeant to follow.

"I guess there'll be plenty to do," he continued. "That mango pedler was back this morning."

"Eh!" Sergeant Rodman's face grew tense.

"While you were busy with office hours and the like. He didn't stay but a little while. But he made good."

"He didn't——"

"You thought he was gassin', I know. Well, what d'ye think of this?"

The Carabao unfolded a piece of paper which he had already drawn from the pocket of his shirt and showed the sergeant a dull-yellow, irregularly shaped nugget about half the diameter of his finger-nail.

"Gold!" said the Carabao. "Heft it!"

"It's gold, all right," agreed the sergeant, passing it back. His voice had become as dull in tone as the nugget was in color.

"I guess there ain't anybody but you and the men on guard that hasn't got one of these souvenirs," continued the Carabao. "He must've given away about a thousand dollars' worth of gold this morning."

"Does he claim not to know what it's worth?"

"If he knew, he wouldn't be givin' it away, would he? And he wouldn't be offerin' to take the whole company in a bunch to where there's a river-bed full of it, for a hundred Mex. in silver. After we come in from the next hike, he says he'll do it." Sergeant Rodman managed a laugh.

"You don't believe that, Carabao."

"I don't know what to believe, but of course I'm stickin' around the mess-tent. No desertion at my time of service, and there's maybe twenty others that feel the same way. But most of the rest— Sergeant, there's goin' to be —— poppin', sure."

"Wanted to take the company all in a bunch, did he?"

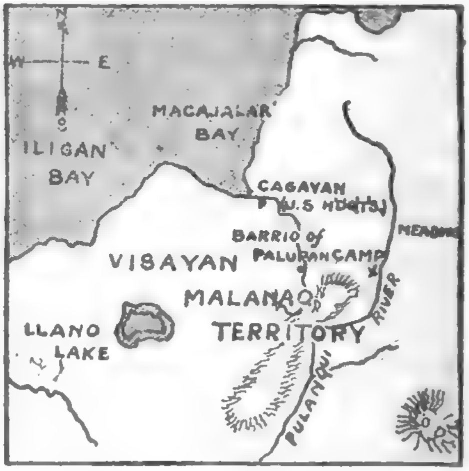
"That's what 'Shorty' Daggett and 'Rednose' made out. They sort of acted as interpreters. Everybody in a bunch, *and* with no objections to rifles."

"Can't be an ambush then, can it?"

"No. And the gugu don't want any money till he shows the gold. That makes it look like the real thing."

Sergeant Rodman pondered a minute.

"Listen, Carabao, I got to tell the lieutenant about this. As man to man and no names mentioned, of course."



"I know you'll do it right, and that's why I told you. I don't want to have to go hikin' all over Mindanao, huntin' up the remains of these mamma's boys, spread-eagled on ant-hills. Now I guess I'll go and grab a grass-hook."

The two emerged into the company street, where Sergeant Rodman took general supervision of the work, and Carabao Wilson reported to his corporal, grateful for the five minutes' delay.

For it was hot, hard work. Up and down the company street and around back of the tents the men policed until not even a straw was left on the pounded earth. Then with grass-hooks, entrenching-knives and bare hands they attacked the yellow cogon-grass outside the company area. For half a mile in every direction the ground was already bare and level as a floor; but the men worked without hope of any conclusion to their task, knowing Lieutenant Lockard's opinion that there was no limit to the field of fire desirable about an encampment.

AT NOON recall from police work sounded. At one o'clock came inspection of camp, equipment displayed on bunks. Here was grief! Each article must be placed exactly in its proper position, to a fraction of an inch. Private Hubbell's toothbrush fell on its side when some one brushed against the outside of his tent, jarring his bunk. He did not notice it, and received — too impassively — the E. P. D. he had missed in the morning. Regulations demanded that the bristles point up.

But that was impersonal, of course. Others received equal punishment for similar offenses. Lieutenant Lockard had determined that no men could ever accuse him of favoritism or the reverse.

There was no waste time. Inspection was over at one forty-five. At two they went out to drill.

For two hours they did open and close order; squads right, squads left and skirmish run; bayonet exercise, aiming and firing exercise, trigger-pulling. On the double they charged from the clearing into the tangled cogon and fell flat at the word into flesh-rasping straw and a smother of dead débris and dust. Lying so, they sighted with bloodshot, aching eyes and snapped their triggers at imaginary enemies. All in an inferno of heat, that was—or rather, on a gridiron between two infernos, for the baked earth gave back all the heat of the sun. Sergeant Rodman's voice grew choked and husky, and the voices of the non-coms repeating the commands grew weak and irritable; but Lieutenant Lockard seemed comfortable enough as he followed about and watched his company with thoughful, critical eyes, flinging instructions here, reproof there, and now and then a terse command.

"A little close order now, sergeant."

"Faster on that double time. *One, two, three, four!*"

"When you hit the earth, *hug it*. Keep down! Keep down!"

But for all his seeming comfortable self-confidence, when it was all over and the men had gone back to their tents and their bunks, to rival each other in cursing the camp and their officer and the flaming island itself, and in lower, eager tones to discuss the fantastic golden possibility that had opened on their horizon—well, when they were thus companionably engaged, Lieutenant Lockard wearily slumped on his own bunk, alone, and doubly perplexed in that he did not know whether there was cause for any perplexity at all.

What was wrong with his command—or was anything wrong with it? Could there be anything wrong with it, considering the formula he had used?

He had come to that camp inexperienced, but with a word in his mind like a litany. Indeed, it was a good word, a soldierly word, a word expressing the Army's creed, the Army's necessity—the word oftenest repeated in the stern school in which he had spent four years. And he had instantly seen that in Camp Meadows that word had fallen into disregard.

There was good fellowship here, but there was not discipline. And of course there was not the cohesion which discipline gives, which welds a command into a unit to be flung as a single weapon against a foe.

He had set out to give it that cohesion. And he had succeeded. At drills, on hikes, in every line of duty, his company was a mechanism which obeyed his voice or gesture. And he had so drilled, worked and trimmed it, transferring weak men, that physically it was up to anything, could take care of itself anywhere. Why, it should be grateful to him. It should——

Suddenly he started. "It!" The word was like a flare of light, revealing a new lane of speculation.

But he refused to enter that lane. "It" was the word. The company *was* a unit, he was its commander. The trouble was—But really there was no trouble. A process of adjustment, that was all, made necessary by the laxity of the preceding commander.

And perhaps by the laxity of Sergeant Rodman. He *was* too familiar with the men, for a first sergeant. And sometimes he had seemed to sympathize with them, take their part. That would of course be intolerable if it were true. Well— He sighed deeply. He felt very lonely.

After which he roused himself, stripped and bathed in a quart of warm water poured from a gourd, and dressed; and then set to fitting together and reproducing on the thinnest of paper, maps of the country round about which he and his command had made on their practise marches. He was busy at that until taps.

In their smaller tent Private Hubbell continued to mumble to his tentmate Simpson after taps had gone.

"It ain't the E. P. D.," said Hubbell. "It ain't the confinin' me to my tent. It's—it's the way he looks at me. I had a peach of a dog once. He was so good they put him in a show. I remember how they took care of him, kept him brushed and combed and everything. And how he hated it and used to snarl at them. It was the way they looked at him. Like *he* looks at me."

"Well, I ain't interested," said Private Simpson, who ordinarily liked to listen to Hubbell's "ravings." "What I'm interested in is that river full o' gold. I'm sure goin' over the hill with that gugu next week."

Hubbell was silent for a moment. When he spoke, the words seemed fairly forced out of him by the growth of a tremendous and terrible hope.

"I hope to —— you do go. I hope to —— you all go."

THE next morning, shortly after breakfast, Lieutenant Lockard was seated at his desk putting into a waterproof cover a map upon which he had traced the route for the next five-day hike. Looking up, he saw Rodman approaching.

The sight of him recalled to the lieutenant those doubts which had come to him last night, and the further thought that as first sergeant Rodman had had much to do with Lieutenant Bagler's lax régime, and was presumably still sympathetic toward it. He straightened as the sergeant stopped in front of him, returned his salute very punctiliously and waited for him to speak.

Sergeant Rodman hesitated a moment, looking uncharacteristically ill at ease. The lieutenant tapped impatiently on the desk with his pen. Finally the sergeant blurted out the old but very infrequently used formula—

"Sir, I would like to speak to you as man to man."

Instantly he knew that in spite of himself a note of antagonism had crept into his voice as he made the request. Perhaps it was anger at the necessity of making it, or a reflex of his own embarrassment. Anyway he could not help it. He stood at attention, waiting the result.

To Lieutenant Lockard's astonishment something warm and friendly seemed to rise within him and reach out toward Sergeant Rodman as the sergeant stood there also trying to reach through the barrier of rank. Angrily the lieutenant beat that feeling down. Here was simply another attack upon discipline. Once it were relaxed, touched by the dissolving finger of familiarity— No! Nor was it good that he should fling away the right to take official action concerning anything Sergeant Rodman should tell him.

"What is it, *sergeant?*" he asked without unbending.

He saw Sergeant Rodman flush at the refusal, struggle to control his features, succeed in doing so, hesitate with clamped jaw, and finally decide to go on. But not freely. Certainly there was a note of cautious reserve in the sergeant's voice, as well as a continuance of that unmilitary note of anger.

"I wanted to talk to you about the company. The men are discontented. It seems to me there is danger of wholesale desertions. They——"

"Desertions, sergeant!" The lieutenant looked at him a trifle impatiently. "Are you sure you're not getting a little—well, nervous? Wholesale desertions practically in the face of the enemy, and from a camp situated like this! It would be almost unprecedented, wouldn't it?"

"Well, you see, conditions are unprecedented, as you say, sir. And as you said yesterday, their morale's shot to—well, it's pretty low. And now——"

"Conditions unprecedented!" The officer's eyes hardened, and his voice grew crisp with anger. "Now just what do you mean by that?"

For at least ten seconds Sergeant Rodman stared at the slanting tent roof without replying. A whimsical memory came to him—and a great temptation! The memory was that of the prisoner who was told that anything he might say would be used against him—it seemed to be that way with him. The temptation—well, it could hardly be called that. It was the renewed suggestion of a plan that he had mulled over secretly many times the last few weeks, by which, even if the worst came, he might save Company D from complete demoralization. If it simultaneously taught this young nincompoop a lesson, so much the better! And if it fed Sergeant Rodman's own egotism— But he did not go into that.

His justification was perfect in his own mind; but the habits of the Army were strong on him, and he opened his mouth again to explain.

"I think, sir——"

But the delay, and perhaps something in Sergeant Rodman's expression, had made the officer impatient, and he interrupted:

"One condition has been unprecedented at least, and that's the amount of complaining that's been done, and the mutinous spirit. And as I was also saying yesterday, I think I know where to place most of the responsibility for it. I believe it's an axiom of the service that a dissatisfied first sergeant means a dissatisfied command."

"Sir, I've—" began Sergeant Rodman defensively, and then suddenly clamped his jaws hard with an air of resolution.

"Perhaps, on the other hand, you invite complaints by being afraid of them," the lieutenant went on more mildly, resolving to temper a suddenly conceived necessity and let Sergeant Rodman out as easily as possible. "There's something in that, you know. A sort of contagion. That's why too much zeal is sometimes as mischievous as too little. I really think that's what is wrong in your case. The last month *has* been rather trying, whipping the company into shape, and you've allowed yourself to get nervous. Under other circumstances you'd probably make a most efficient first sergeant.

"But now I believe it's for the best interests of the command that you be relieved of that duty. Have Sergeant Hewes report to me immediately as your relief. Later you will turn over your roster and other papers to him. You will return to regular duty. That will do, sergeant."

"Very well, sir."

Sergeant Rodman saluted and turned.

Unquestionably he must be getting nervous, for he found himself strangling a desire to laugh loudly and unrestrainedly.

Sergeant Hewes did laugh when informed by Rodman of his unexpected promotion and the reason therefor, but presently grew sober enough.

"——, what's to happen now? If he won't listen to you, I ain't goin' to tell him anything. And even if I did, what good would it do? All he'd do would be to restrict and punish, and that's made things worse. There'll be one big flock o' rookies flyin' the coop next week."

"Listen!" said Sergeant Rodman. "I got a plan."

He talked earnestly and rapidly for several minutes, at the end of which time Sergeant Hewes was in delighted agreement.

"That'll fix the young cub," he said.

"Now listen again," said Sergeant Rodman; "what I'm thinking about is savin' the company. If I can take a fall out of the shavetail doin' it, I won't lie and say I'll be sorry, but the other's our first objective, and I want everybody to remember it."

"Oh, sure!" said Hewes, knowing that Sergeant Rodman really spoke the truth, or thought he did.

The next morning began the very hardest five-day hike that the company had yet endured. A foot-blistering, leg-wearying, back-breaking endurance contest, such as would ordinarily have made those who took it swear enviously at the camp guard that remained behind.

True, they rested during the hottest period of the day, but reveille was before sunrise, and sunset had no meaning for Lieutenant Lockard. True also, they made maps part of the time, every man helping, pacing distances, measuring angles, tracing the Pulangui on paper; and sometimes they stopped to wigwag and heliograph over great distances; and twice had a company swim. But for all that it was such a hot, harassing, savagely exhausting experience that it was really strange they endured it so cheerfully.

Lieutenant Lockard led them northward into the foot-hills of the Rangayan Range, toward the source of the Pulangui River.

In the lower foot-hills it was rather pleasant—tiny *barrios* built all of grass, from which brown people looked out at them silently with whatever they felt of curiosity or distrust or malevolence hidden behind faces like brown parchment and eyes of black opacity. Here and there from the concealing underbrush came stray exclamations, whisperings, furtive movements, swift, scampering retreats.

There were trees here, too, all sorts of trees—a curious kind of banyan, growing out of the junction of a dozen roots twenty feet in the air; tall bamboos, tuba-palms with aerial ladders running from tree to tree, juniper, ebony, cypress. These swarmed with birds, all sizes and colors, hornbills, cockatoos, parrots, doves and the *pulada* with a splotch like blood on its soft, gray breast. There were deer for the hunting, wild hogs and monkeys, and a strange thing flitting through the tree-tops which no one could tell from a monkey or a bat. A heaven beside treeless Camp Meadows, this! Or beside that other inferno of black hills which waited for them ahead!

Of course, only the shortest of stops could be permitted here, for fear of mix-ups with the natives. Lieutenant Lockard expected sullenness and veiled complaints when he pushed on through this paradise. Instead, there was a curious indifference concerning the march, an odd excitement concerning something else; and, at the halts, low talk in groups—which talk, whenever he approached, turned into silence like a wall.

The lieutenant grew troubled and angry at this, particularly when he noticed that Sergeant Rodman was almost always at the center of these groups. But there was really nothing upon which he could hang a complaint.

THE next day they dipped down to a place where the Pulangui had widened into a sort of interminable swamp—a place of morasses, quagmires, deep and sullen pools of black water, wide crevasses, which dense, concealing underbrush sometimes turned into traps. Here they must pick their way, doubling and turning, deep in mud at one moment, crawling over the top of impenetrable thicket at another, falling through that thicket into mire in which sprawled six-foot iguanas and leeches quick to attach themselves.

Oh, a stinking, dirty day that was! Why were the men so happy? Lieutenant Lockard found himself longing to hear an honest curse again. Instead there was laughter, quiet and secretive, more mischievous than malicious; twinkles from eye to eye at a jest that every man shared but himself.

At a jest which entered like a wedge into the already existing breach between the lieutenant and his men, forcing them still further apart. Or was it Sergeant Rodman who was entering between them? The lieutenant's growing sense of isolation and helplessness rasped his spirits like haircloth. He grew tensely irritable, wanting to strike and strike hard, but could find no excuse.

Never were commands more instantly obeyed than his, never did company mechanism work on smoother hinges. And still Lieutenant Lockard came to feel that he and not the company had become the automaton, that he and his commands were merely being tolerated temporarily, that he was being conducted rather than conducting, and to an end that every one knew but him.

All the way north and all the way back that feeling increased, that he was detached, disposed of, walking in a sort of spiritual vacuum. That he had lost all contact with his men. That was it, that he had now lost *all* contact.

Nor was there change in that respect during the first day's routine in camp. But on the following morning, Lieutenant Lockard found even the shell of his authority crumbled.

He slept a little late that morning. Slowly into his sleep crept the disturbing consciousness that he *was* sleeping late, then that reveille had not sounded. With an effort he stirred his long, tired limbs and forced his heavy lids apart. He glanced at his watch, on a camp-stool beside his bed, and in an instant was awake and angry.

"Sentry!" he called.

"Corporal of the guard!" he called more loudly after a moment.

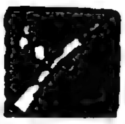
Neither replied, and then he became aware of the unnatural silence of the camp. No one seemed to be even breathing

He had started to dress. Suddenly alarmed, he left off, parted the flap of his tent and looked out.

What he saw wiped out for the moment all physical consciousness. The next thing he knew he was standing in the open, looking around upon the evidence of what he would have said was an impossible catastrophe.

For the camp was deserted. Entirely deserted, it appeared. The tents were empty; so were the slings for the rifles, and the nails in the tent-poles upon which haversacks and canteens had hung. No sound came to him but the near-by rasp of a cicada.

Then after a moment something seemed to stir. For a moment it seemed to him that he was not alone.



BY THAT time his men had put nearly six hours of average hiking between themselves and him. They had left Camp Meadows a little after midnight, heading westward, the native mango pedler their guide.

At first they marched much as if Lieutenant Lockard had been with them, in single file, "at ease" and well closed up. No straggling! No smoking, to widen their visibility a mile each way! And, though the complete silence demanded by "at ease" could not be compelled, no loud talking nor singing. All this had been insisted upon by Sergeant Rodman when making plans for the mutiny which he chose to term "just a little voluntary hike."

"There's gotta be discipline. Any man that don't agree to that, say so before you start, and then don't start. We're leavin' in good shape, and we're comin' back the same way or the whole thing will be spoiled.

"Far as I'm concerned I don't believe in the gold—not at all. But there can't be that any harm's intended to us, or the attempt would be to scatter us, and not to draw us off in a single body. There's no force in Mindanao anxious to tackle us that way. So I vote that every man Jack go and have a crack at it, and incidentally h'ist the lieutenant out of Company D and likely outa the service.

"You see what'll happen when he finds us gone. He'll go to Cagayan and report, of course, and that'll be bad enough, for a shavetail to have his whole company desert on him. But when headquarters sends out a company or so to round us up, and they come to Camp Meadows to pick up the trail, and find us there all safe and sound and only asking for a decent officer to take command—why, what'll be the verdict? 'Unfit to command men,' and back he'll go to the ribbon counter or some job he's suited to, and a good thing for him as well as for the service.

"But to do that we gotta come back a hundred per cent. strong. I'll give you twenty-four hours with the gold, if there is any, and you can carry as much as you like back to camp; but back to camp you gotta come, and be all ready there for headquarters."

So he had pledged them, and it is likely most of them meant the pledge when they took it. But theirs was now the contagion of revolt. One authority lawlessly overturned, the other irked them, and it had the weakness of having shared in their outlawry. So before they had gone many miles there was a challenge in their undertones, much conspiratory muttering, rebukes from non-coms. and reenlisted men, and a growing spirit of division and excitement that made Sergeant Rodman begin to doubt his judgment.

So far not even the wilder spirits suggested a complete violation of their pledges and permanent desertion. But whether they found the gold or not, they wanted a longer liberty, hunting and the taste of the wild deer and hog, a visit to a *barrio* or so, *vino* and other forbidden pleasures.

"I suppose they think themselves that they'll stop at that," growled Carabao Wilson to Sergeant Rodman. "If they have their way, there'll be rookies dottin' Mindanao all over, some of 'em raisin' coffee-colored kids, but more of 'em feedin' ants or crows. As for us old-timers, we might as well keep goin' if they do. We'll all get general courts and kick-outs for leadin' 'em astray."

"Now don't you worry a bit," returned Sergeant Rodman more confidently than he felt. "Just back me up when the time comes, you and the others. Them gumboots'll go back to their happy home if they have to be carried on stretchers."

But the "gumboots" were vastly in the majority. And the farther they got in actual miles from their deposed ruler back in Camp Meadows, the further they withdrew in spirit from the fresh authority represented by Sergeant Rodman. Also, the wilder grew their dreams.

For a very good reason, unknown to them, Lieutenant Lockard had never hiked them westward. Therefore they knew nothing of this country they were entering except that no white man knew very much more. And where nothing is known, anything is possible—stranger things than virgin gold. Old, old tales of a hidden white tribe were retold, and fresh tales of Spanish monasteries hung with pearls and gold taken from the Celebes pirates, now captured and turned into tabernacles for grinning native gods. Weird, incredible tales indeed; but the harder they drove their imaginations against the restricting wall of the possible, the farther it seemed to recede.

So on through the rest of the night. Now and then they passed a *nipa* shack; and here and there, a little off the route the native led them, the moonlight showed them a tiny village. Once they silently passed through a valley dotted with coconut-palms and breadfruit, and as fresh and green underneath as an unspoiled Eden. There were many native houses in this valley, too. It was a place to remember.

In the morning they made breakfast high

in a pass which cut the Rangayan Mountains through from east to west. Then they discovered something that startled every one and threw a grim shadow over what had been, for most of them, a lark.

Last night, at the edge of the cogon that surrounded Camp Meadows, they had covered and counted off in a whisper. Every one had been present. Now one man was missing.

Private Hubbell, of course!

Many seemed to have expected it. And certainly from the first no one questioned why he had dropped out, or where he had gone. He had doubled back to camp, and by now very likely had settled accounts with Lieutenant Lockard.

No use returning! And indeed, now a very good argument for those who wished never to return at all. An argument which even some of the non-coms. echoed, who had given the best of their lives to the service, but who would be held at least partly responsible for whatever might happen back at ill-fated Camp Mad'ouse.

So on and on, the youngsters particularly heartened by the promises of the native guide, who told them that if they kept on hiking, he would bring them by evening to the river-bed full of gold.

In the heat of the morning they came to a narrow, oven-like pass between the crests of two mountains. Beyond was a scorched desolation of black rocks and more rocks; then down the easier slope on the western side of the range. And in the middle of the afternoon they indeed began to catch glimpses of a river winding ribbon-like between these hills and others farther west.

That was the river he spoke of, the native indicated with weird gestures and guttural grunts. Whereupon Sergeant Rodman, who had studied his map, knew beyond doubt that the guide was a liar, but also knew that all but a few of the company would still insist upon going on.

But when they were still an hour from the river he issued certain terse orders without any argument at all; so when they came to the inevitable swale of cogon-grass which bordered the river they were marching silently, single file, rifles at the ready.

The guide turned to the right through that cogon and led them down-stream. The grass was so high that they could not see the river, but they knew it was somewhere on their left. Toward night the sounds of a native *barrio* began to drift to them from somewhere ahead and in the direction of the river—cocks crowing, dogs barking, pigs squealing, and a greater sound of talking than they had ever before heard from any *barrio* of Visayans. Talking in which men's voices predominated excessively.

Now even the youngest began to doubt the story of the gold. But in another way these sounds were most reassuring, for it seemed positive that if an ambush were contemplated, the *barrio* would be silent as death. So when they came to a place directly between the *barrio* riverward and a V-shaped notch in the hills, and the storm broke, never were troops more astonished.

A single shot, followed by a very ragged volley of perhaps a hundred rifles, all from the direction of the *barrio*. Abominably bad shooting, it seemed; if they had judged only by the bullets, some of the men would not have known they were being fired upon.

"As skirmishers, prone!" ordered Sergeant Rodman.

Muscle-memory made each man hug the earth as he flung his piece forward and searched the cogon for a target. Then Carabao, lying near Sergeant Rodman at the extreme right, found his target, sending a bullet through the head of the guide who had brought them there and who was stealing off through the cogon.

None of the Americans had yet been hit. Now a thing became noticeable that helped account for that—the extreme depth of the enemy line. While some of the rifles crashed only a hundred yards or so away, others popped futilely at a thousand yards or more. Still more puzzling was the sound of a great scurrying and shouting from even farther away, as if something had given the *barrio* itself a very great surprize.

"Something funny here; eh, sergeant?" said Carabao Wilson. "Well, which way we goin'?"

"To the river," said Sergeant Rodman rather dully. "Pass the word—to the river."

Indeed, it seemed the only chance. As long as light lasted, the Americans could take care of themselves all right by superiority of rifle handling. But the sun was not much more than half an hour high. With darkness would come the attack with edged weapons, creese and *kampilan* against the bayonet, which is by no means the white man's natural killing tool. The odds against the whites would be great even if the numbers were even.

But to judge from the growing tumult ahead, the enemy would be many to one. With darkness would come an overwhelming wave of muscular brown bodies, an annihilating descent of razor-like blades. Nor would their chances be improved if they fled into the trap-like notch in the hills behind them.

But if they could win to the river, they might find boats. There might be a rock midstream upon which they could rally and defend themselves, or a bamboo bridge upon which they could escape, wrecking it behind them. Or some might even escape by swimming at the last.

Besides, the enemy lay between them and the river, and they had been trained mostly to advance. So they began crawling that way, keeping their intervals and guiding on the right and sprinkling the cogon, under Sergeant Rodman's directions, with a slow, investigative fire.

All the while the confusion in the *barrio* ahead of them seemed to increase.

IT WAS about the time in the morning that the company discovered Private Hubbell's absence, that Lieutenant Lockard stood looking around at his command of empty tents.

The cicada rasped on. From somewhere on the edge of the jungle came the human-like cry of a gecko. Some vagrant impulse stirred the hot, dead air; the sea of cogon rustled slightly; and it seemed to the lieutenant that he could almost hear the distant *clap-clapping* of palm-fronds. Because these sounds would ordinarily be imperceptible, they heightened Lockard's sense of solitude, and made him forget the feeling he had had a moment before that he was not, in fact, alone.

Slowly he went back to his tent and washed and dressed himself, as carefully as if he had been going on parade. While doing this he resolutely put down his anger—a hot and sulfurous anger it was, accumulated during the hike which had foreshadowed this, and now redoubled—and forced himself to think things over calmly.

Whichever way his men had gone, he would probably have no difficulty in following their trail. And if it were north, south or east, they would probably neither meet with much trouble nor cause it—though one could never tell, officerless and in these *barrios!*

But to the west! His face tightened.

The cicada stopped singing abruptly, in the middle of a note. Now that was a curious thing! He stopped and listened a moment, holding a legging in his hand. Then he buckled the legging on, left his tent and started down to the mess-hall. One arm was thrust through a strap of his haversack, and he buckled his belt, from which hung his revolver, around his waist as he walked.

The first thing to do was to eat; then he would fill his haversack and take up the trail. After he had found his men and marched them back—he had no doubt of being able to do that—he would—well, he would send for a relief, and then resign.

Results are the only things that count in the service, and he would not quibble with the fact that, given an average detachment in a not extraordinary situation, he had failed to manage it, nor that his failure had periled his men's lives. And more than *their* lives, if they had gone to the west.

He whirled like a flash. Something—But it was nothing, only the creak of a tent-pole. He wondered why it should creak. But he turned and went on.

Failure! And what a miserable time he had had in failing! A lonely time! How distant he had been, and just, and military! Distant! The last few days he had learned the meaning of that, when his men had drawn apart from him and plotted the desertion that had ruined his life.

Anger seethed up in him at that, raging hot; but he fought it down again. He had resolved to waste no time cooking breakfast, so, reaching the mess-tent, he swiftly broke some eggs into a cup, salted the mixture and started to gulp it down. A sneering laugh sounded behind him. He whipped around to find Private Hubbell standing just inside the mess-tent with his rifle at "ready," pointed straight at the lieutenant's chest.

"So the pretty officer might dirty his pretty hands, making a fire," said Private Hubbell. "Well, that's a pity. Because he has breakfast to get for two, this morning."

Something inside Lieutenant Lockard seemed to snap—a very distinct relief! He heard himself laughing aloud almost merrily, and without realizing it he crouched for a spring. In time he remembered that

Hubbell was a ready and accurate shot. But even the realization that he was at Hubbell's mercy did not dampen the joy he felt of being at last loose from the leash.

"Why, you —— fool!" he cried. "And who's the other fool?"

A glint of surprize came into Hubbell's eyes.

"There ain't anybody else. Just you an' me. We'll have a nice, quiet breakfast together, man and man, but it's only fair you cook it. You eat regular enough, but I never saw you doin' any K. P. yet. Only first we'll have another little performance."

He had come a few feet closer to the lieutenant. The latter thought of a trick that he had been told was usually successful in such cases, if the enlisted man was well-trained—that of snapping "Attention!" and leaping in upon the man as his muscles flexed in automatic obedience. But he was through with that sort of thing.

"And what's the other performance?" he grated joyfully.

"First unbuckle your belt and throw it over in that corner, and don't get your hand near your revolver while you're doin' it."

"Now why should I do that?"

"Because I don't want to have to shoot you."

"Then just what do you want?"

The private studied him with narrowed eyes.

"You seem mighty pleased about something. Maybe you'll feel different when I tell you that I'm going to give you the ——est thrashing you ever saw anybody get."

The lieutenant laughed at him.

"That's just what I hoped. You don't have to hold me up for that."

Swiftly he unbuckled his belt and flung it and his revolver on the mess-table.

"Now put down your rifle and come on."

"It seems to me you've changed a lot," said Hubbell suspiciously, but putting his rifle aside nevertheless. "Yesterday you acted like you wouldn't touch me with a ten-foot pole. Just to let you know how I feel—" he faced the lieutenant—"I've passed up a fortune for this, and I'm not sorry. I wouldn't miss it for all the —— gold in the world."

Hubbell was coming on now, his lithe young body crouched, his fists up. And Lockard stepped forward too, wearing a furious smile. Then at Hubbell's last words a touch of puzzlement, of fear, came into Lockard's face.

"A fortune! Gold!" he stammered.

For an instant he stood neglecting to guard himself. Then Hubbell leaped.

Automatically Lockard's hands went up. He retreated before a flurry of punishing blows. Now and then when there was an opening he struck, skilfully, swiftly, but without a punch. He seemed to pull his blows; he seemed almost to push instead of strike, as if he were trying to spare Hubbell as well as himself. This seemed to madden Hubbell as well as assure him of victory. He tore in recklessly, viciously, trying for Lockard's face, trying to mar his features.

"—— you, if you won't fight, you'll take it. You'll know you've been in ——"

"Hubbell, for ——'s sake, what did you mean by ——"

But in the intensity of his feeling Lockard unconsciously slackened his guard, and his question, so nearly a pleading one, was cut short by a right-hand smash full in the mouth.

At that something snapped inside Lockard, and he also went furious. All at once with some surprize he found himself fighting like a wild beast, with as much abandon, as much efficiency and as little science. It seemed to him that his self-control had simply been used up. Hubbell found Lockard standing toe to toe with him, dealing smashing blows. A mad grin still further disfigured the officer's sadly chopped-up face and disheartened the private at least as much as the realization that the other's long, lean arms were especially made for just such give and take. Between blows Hubbell's hatred, intensified by this change of fortune, expressed itself in taunts.

"A —— of an officer! —— company walked away from you, eh! Led away by a —— *muchacho*! A Filipino *Pied Piper*, eh!"

The words registered, but on a different part of Lockard's personality from what was at that moment in control. He said to himself that he would remember them, that was all. Suddenly he found that Hubbell had charged forward and forced him backward against the end of a mess-bench. The edge of the bench caught him at the knees. The next instant he had fallen backward, dragging the private down with him, and for a while they rolled over and over on the dirt floor like mad dogs, snarling, clawing, pounding at each other. Once they found themselves fighting right over Lockard's revolver, which had been knocked from the mess-table. Each suspected for an instant that the other would try to seize and use it. But neither did, and in a moment they worked away from it.

The change in the fighting favored the private, who was as active as a cat. Suddenly Lockard found himself squarely on his back, wedged in between the top of an overturned mess-table and the tent-wall. The private was choking him with his left hand, striking him with his right fist. Lockard knew he would be gone in a moment. At that, fear came to him, coupled with memory, and freshened his strength. Somehow he managed to get a hand up, to dash Hubbell's head sidewise against a tent-pole. Hubbell's grip weakened. The lieutenant pressed him back, scrambled up.

"The company! Tell me what happened? What happened?"

Again they were on their feet, pummeling each other. Again the officer was retreating, trying to save himself, to spare the private.

"What's it matter to us? I'm not beat yet. Take that!"

But the blow was a weak one—weak and slow. Hubbell was still giddy from the impact of his head upon the pole. Lockard was able to evade the fist, and Hubbell spun half-way round. In a flash Lockard leaped forward, twined his long arms around Hubbell's body with Hubbell's arms pinioned, and clasped his own hands behind Hubbell's back.

"It matters all right," Lockard gasped. "They were led off, then! To the west?"

Hubbell was struggling desperately.

"Yes, but if you think you can stall off——"

"——, man, I'm not stalling. The company's in danger of being butchered—get that! And we may save it, but not if—Are you white or brown? American or traitor? Are you going to keep me here, and yourself, and maybe cripple us both, while——"

Suddenly the meaning of Lockard's words seemed to penetrate Hubbell's consciousness. Lockard felt his whole body grow tensely quiet.

"I'm no traitor —!" he clipped off the honorary salutation.

Swiftly Lockard released him and stepped back. They confronted each other—sadly damaged figures, but neither with a thought for his own or the other's injuries.

"I know you're not, Hubbell. As for this, it'll wait, won't it? If both of us go on living, and if not— Now tell me quickly."

For another moment Hubbell hesitated, considering his duty to his comrades. In the soldier's code "snitching" is an act abominable. But if Lockard told the truth—and Hubbell knew he did—then surely there was reason enough. Briefly and clearly Hubbell told the story, even to Sergeant Rodman's purpose to keep the company intact, and his early zeal to prevent desertion.

And then Lieutenant Lockard told what he knew.

"The gold's a lie, of course. So far from there being an unknown river over there it's the most thickly settled part of Misamis. That's one reason I've been keeping out of it.

"Another reason lately is that over there in a *barrio* called Palupan, on the Cagayan River, the Visayans are holding a powwow. Representatives from every *barrio*, hundreds of 'em, maybe thousands. Soldiers, most of 'em. And they've come there to decide finally whether to acknowledge American rule. There's a Mohammedan tribe to the south, the Malanaos, trying to get them to break away. The Malanaos used to govern them.

"They think it's a secret, but headquarters knows, all right. Only headquarters wants them left alone to use their own horse-sense. But you see what it would mean to the Malanaos to start a fight between a company of Americans and that crowd of Visayans. Especially if they could make it seem like a treacherous attack on our part, and then get our men massacred, so they could never tell their story. You see what's planned to happen?

"All Mindanao will be on the warpath again, with the Malanaos at their head. Unless we can overtake the men—Leave your rifle, Hubbell. I've another revolver."

For Hubbell had already turned to make ready. Hastily they filled their canteens and shoved some dried beef and hardtack into their pockets. The lieutenant finished first; then he broke many eggs into two tin cups and the two men drank them raw, knowing them the food for swift hiking. Nor did either notice that the officer had in fact prepared the private's breakfast. They were not thinking of precedence then.

HIKING at three miles an hour is work. Speed up to four, and you have a pace that very good men, well-trained, can keep up hour after hour in a temperate climate. Given jungle trail and a near-equatorial sun, and it becomes something of a horror.

The mutineers had been gone six hours when Lockard and Hubbell started. Lockard figured they would travel about two and a half miles per hour. That put them fifteen miles away. Now if they continued at two and a half miles per hour, they would reach Palupan a little after dark that night. And if Lockard and Hubbell could average four miles, they would probably overtake the company in time.

So Hubbell, who led at first, tried to keep going at that pace. It was not hard in the cogon, but after they struck the upward slope of the foot-hills, covered with brush and creepers, it was different. Both men were soon breathing in gasps, and when Lockard advanced to take his turn at breaking the way and following the trail of broken twigs and branches Hubbell took the easier spell behind with relief.

So they alternated at half-hour intervals. They had not made many such exchanges before both men knew that Hubbell, used to carrying a heavy knapsack and rifle, showed up a better hiker than the lieutenant. And they had not gone much farther before Hubbell realized that, although the lieutenant might admit he was not equal to Hubbell, he would never admit he was not equal to the trail—that there was something in him which would drive him on and on as long as he could stir a muscle, and that he could do that as long as his consciousness endured.

Hubbell walked straight as yet, but every now and then Lockard caught himself swaying from the waist like a drunken man.

His leg muscles ached, his body felt weak and flaccid, he breathed in gasps, and his heart pounded audibly, frightfully. His eyes became curtained with a bloodshot film through which he saw Hubbell plodding on before him, seemingly with terrible ease; but he was also always able to see the face of his watch, and when the time came, he increased the cadence and took the lead. And he never slacked off on the pace.

The sun became like a flame scorching their backs. Gnats rose in showers, stinging them, filling their eyes and nostrils. Brambles tore their clothes and flesh and held them back; creepers caught at their feet and sometimes flung them headlong. Sweat mingled with blood and dust and stains from bruised grass and leaves to mottle their clothing weirdly. They passed native shacks without seeing them, *barrios* without seeing them; and wondering groups of natives stared after them and murmured:

"*Loco! Loco!*"

Then the ascent grew steeper. They knew it by the added weight to which they must put their wills, lifting it, lifting it each moment, an encumbrance of dead flesh.

For it came to that. Their bodies grew numb, like death. But, though dead, they must be kept alive, kept erect, kept going, step after step, step after step. That was as far ahead as they dared look, just one effort more, then another, then another. The constant repetition of this act of willing fagged their brains, wore their nerves down with trip-hammer blows. They could have shrieked aloud at times, if they could have spared the strength. It was terrible.

It was worse in the barren uplands, where they lost the trail at times and had to circle to find it—twin ragged and bloody horrors, running wabbly rings on the fiery mountainside like flies caught on a stove-lid. Once they lost half an hour that way. But a sparkle from the dead surface of rock far ahead caught Lockard's eyes, and when he reached it he found a bright meat-knife. Then on and on again, staggering continually, falling often, in a nightmare of effort, a painful delirium, with their very wills at last following their vanquished bodies into a state of numbness.

Then it was that a force not quite the natural possession of any man, but born of their training, was required to keep them going. Neither was remembering his rank by then, nor the quarrel that was between them, nor the rivalry that had stimulated them at first. There were long intervals when neither remembered the plight of the detachment ahead, nor the probability that Mindanao would run red with blood if that detachment was not warned. But they were soldiers who had set a command upon themselves; and they only knew they must keep following this trail, in agony and madness, until there came an end to it.

Now their pace was a shamble. Now when they fell they made way on their hands and knees. But somehow they always got to their feet again.

Then there was relief. Through a thick red mist they saw the walls of the pass through the uplands close about them, and they felt the way grow level to their feet. A little later, through the same crimson haze, they were looking to the west, down the slope of the mountain.

They grinned horribly at each other, foreseeing rest from that eternal effort for foot-movement. Ahead would be places where they could let themselves go: precipices down which they could slip and slide and scramble, slopes down which they could run or even roll, the force of gravity with them. The killing lift, lift, lift was ended. Still grinning crazily, down the slope they started at a jogging trot; but before he had gone a dozen feet Lockard tumbled over.

He lay where he fell, unconscious; and as if something that had supported him had given way, Hubbell also fell and lay still. Some time later Hubbell felt something pulling at his sleeve. It was Lockard, and Hubbell got up and followed him.

On that downward course they spared themselves effort in every way they had foreseen, and in other ways. Their uniforms became unrecognizable as such; but they, torn, bruised and still going, were unmistakably men.

The sun swung over them and down to the west, cutting a fiery arc. It was bright in their faces and on the river below them when they heard the sound of their quarry to their right front—a low-noted jumble of white men's voices.

Abandoning the trail, they followed the sound, cutting through a swale of cogon. Now the river was to their left; and to the right and a little ahead, a notch of black rocks whose walls were steep and high. Ahead, the singing and talking had stopped, but there were other sounds—the sounds of a native *barrio*.

"That's Palupan," whispered Lockard. "It's to the left, on the river."

He managed to stagger forward a little faster.

"But the company's going on," mumbled Hubbell.

"Maybe. But I think—I think I see the plan. Not unless we catch them, they won't——"

A rifle went off ahead, followed by the crackling of a ragged, scattered volley. Puffs of smoke arose from the cogon in two almost parallel lines, one straight to the front, the other about a thousand yards to the left, toward the river and the *barrio*.

"We're too late," muttered Hubbell.

"Maybe. But we'll keep on. Listen! Do you see what's happening?"

"I think so—sir. It's probably Malanaos that are firing. They're between our company and the *barrio*, and they're firing on both. Our company will advance, of course, and the Visayans—well, the pow-wow of fighters you spoke about will break up, and they'll probably advance, too. But the Malanaos will be caught, it seems."

"No, they'll slip out on both sides, through the cogon, as soon as they get the other two parties started. And the Visayans will always believe the Americans attacked them, and the other way around too, of course. Or they would, only—We're going to bust that up, Hubbell—maybe!"

Swiftly he explained. It was a very simple plan, but Hubbell repeated his part in it, Army fashion, to make sure there could be no misunderstanding.

Then they separated, each taking his stealthy and dangerous way through the cogon, the private toward a point a little to the right and ahead, where a thin volume of controlled rifle fire, steadily advancing, indicated the American position; the lieutenant toward the angry *barrio* of Palupan, swarming with Visayan warriors, justifiably and murderously angry at the unknown and invisible attackers and already opening fire.

The private made his objective. Tottering, crawling and at last creeping through the cogon, he got within two hundred yards of the left flank of the American line. He judged the distance by the sound of the shooting. There he stopped and hailed his comrades—wisely! They were not likely to hold their fire for close examination of any one approaching their line; and it would have taken close examination indeed to tell the race, color and previous condition of this battered wreck that was Private Hubbell. Now he might have been a Gargantuan broken beetle crawling along.

But just as he hailed, a thing happened that showed he still had a sting.

Through the grass from a spot not twenty feet away a man leaped, Death gleaming above his head in the shape of a whirling creese. Mid-distance, his naked brown chest was smashed through by a bullet from Hubbell's revolver. Another bullet took him in the throat; the creese whistled where Hubbell's head had been; and the dead savage fell across the body of Hubbell, who had hard work to crawl out from underneath.

He did not bother with creeping over to retrieve the rusty old rifle which the native had dropped to wield the more familiar and deadly creese. He had seen the danger and had reacted to it, that was all; to him, the attack was only another event in a nightmare.

But when he got to the American firing-line and reported to Sergeant Rodman, hastily detailing the situation as Lieutenant Lockard saw it, he found that corroboration had preceded him. Though the native who had attacked him was dressed in Visayan garb, or lack of it, he was nevertheless a Malanao, recognized as such by Sergeant Rodman and other old-timers who had fought around the lakes to the south—a Malanao by the blackness of his skin, the size and muscularity of his body, the savagery and truculence of his countenance, the general look of the fighting Moro-Malay stock.

* * *

"SO WE'RE to just *lay* here!"

"Dig in, y' rummy!"

"— lay here an' do nothin', while the shavetail palavers. ——, he can't do nothin'."

"Well, ain't we deserved it?" from an older man. "Say, we deserve he does save us and gives us the razz-jazz. That's what we deserve!"

"Look at Hubbell. Say, Hubbell, what did the lieut. do to y'? Y' look like a whole battle by yerself."

"Never mind. Only he did more than you could ever do, you sheep-herder."

"Silence down there!" growled Sergeant Rodman. "You'll give the gugus the range."

"Oh, ——!" muttered Carabao Wilson. "What would they do with it if they had it?"

Still, the firing had been heavy though ill-directed, and the law of average had been working. "Shorty" Daggett was down with a hole in his thigh, Ikey Krasno had a serious wound in his chest, and there were half a dozen minor casualties. That had made it hard to obey the order Hubbell brought—frightfully hard to cease firing, retire to the mouth of the notch and lie there under a driving fire that was every minute increasing. Especially when they imagined the man whom they had despised and deserted, crawling, creeping somewhere in that swale of writhing cogon, straight into the fighting-lines of the Visayans. Risking his life for an explanatory interview; pitting his will and wit against the enormous odds that the angry natives would shoot him down on sight.

In spite of Sergeant Rodman's prohibition the men began to mutter again as they dug in with their bayonets. This time he did not try to silence them.

"He c'n talk Visayan anyway. That's some comfort."

"Yes! 'Member how we used t' laugh at him? Ain't we been fools?"

"Sure have. Wonder what Sergeant Rodman thinks of himself right now?"

"Huh! He wasn't half as bad as the rest of us. He knew a lot of us was goin' to desert anyway, and he figured on keepin' us in line an' marchin' us back. But we was all civilians and millionaires—in our minds."

But Sergeant Rodman was just then feeling about as humble as any recruit.

"By ——, if he gets us out of this," he grumbled to Carabao, "he can do what he likes with me, and I won't object."

"Me, too," said Carabao. "That is, supposin' he does anything with us at all except turn us all over to a G. C. M., which we deserve."

Rodman had crawled up beside Carabao, who was lying on the extreme right flank. Carabao was busier with his eyes than he was with his entrenching-tool; suddenly he whirled his rifle out to the flank and shot; and another Malanao who had been creeping past leaped straight into the air with an ear-splitting yell and fell back dead. This one was identified not only by his features, but by a crimson turban and sash.

"Some high mucktymuck," apologized Carabao. "That 'cease firing' wasn't intended to apply to the likes of him."

"Maybe not, maybe not!" Queer how hesitant Sergeant Rodman had become!

"They're sure goin' around us all right. I bet pretty soon they'll take us in the rear and pretend to the Visayans that they just happened along."

"That's probably the ——'s own truth," agreed Sergeant Rodman. "They won't miss their chance of heaven, carvin' their way to it through some of our supposedly Christian bodies. Well, they'll wait till dark—pretty near that now—and then between the Visayans and the Malanaos, *u-r-ugh!*"

He shivered without concealment, knowing the man he was talking to.

"True enough!" said Carabao. "I had a fancy to be buried in one piece, and from a wooden gun-carriage in an old soldiers' home. I saw one of them funerals once, and 'twas nice and quaint. But bein' as I'm due for a kick-out anyway, I'd probably never get it. Sergeant, don't it strike you it's been a long time since any of us have been hit?"

"They're firin' mighty high. I've been noticin' that. Now, d'you suppose——"

"He hasn't hardly had time, has he?"

"I dunno. It's been half an hour, nearly. He might be lucky, and then he's a fast worker anyway. The firin' has really lifted clear over our heads. It's more dangerous to the Malanaos than to us; that is, if they're really formin' to our rear."

"You think he's done it, then?"

"Maybe, and if he has— Pass the word along the line there to be mighty careful who you shoot at in front. *See* your man first, because— Oh, ——! About face! Good morning glory! Here come the Malanaos."

"Cute ——!" grumbled Carabao, squirming around to face the rifle-fire which had begun to pelt them from the rear. "They want to pose to the Visayans as a rescuin'-party, I suppose. Well, now what?"

"And good night world!" ejaculated Sergeant Rodman feebly as a bullet from their new front struck the muzzle of his rifle and ricochetted against his chest. For a moment the shock flattened him on the ground. Then he began feeling of himself.

"No, I'm all right!" he pronounced surprizedly, and propped himself up on his elbows.

But in the moment that it had been without a commander the thin line of Americans began to waver. Possibly the only thing that kept it from breaking was that there seemed no direction to retreat. If the rifles in front seemed better handled, those to the rear were much more numerous and widespread, extending along the whole front of the V-shaped notch in the mouth of which the Americans lay.

Some of the men hesitated, wabbling between a dozen impulses; others fixed bayonets; others tried to make up by rapidity of fire for the invisibility of their enemy. According to their natures, they were grimly silent, or they bandied jerky jests, or cursed in a steady stream. But none of them who were still thinking at all expected to live fifteen minutes longer. And over the leaderless company as a whole brainless panic was spreading her pallid wings. In another minute or two half of it would be charging, half of it running, all of it hopelessly lost.

"*Steady-y-y! Steady-y-y!* Keep down there, Jackson, Arnett, Brundage. Silence! Attention to orders!"

Mechanically, impersonally, as if they were all back on the parade ground, Lieutenant Lockard spoke from the rear and center of the line. A queer, squirming movement, almost instantly checked, seemed to touch every prone body. The men had started to turn, to substantiate with their eyes the incredible fact of his appearance. But the grip of habit was stronger than anything else; it seized them, flattened them on the ground, cocked their heads sidewise to listen for the next command.

"By volley, fire! Target in front! Ready! Load—aim—fire!"

Like an automaton the lieutenant droned out the familiar commands, intended to control and quiet unsteady troops and simultaneously to demoralize the enemy by showers of lead at the shortest possible interval. And the men obeyed as if they were parts of the same machine. Their bolts clicked in unison, their rifles crashed as one, and ahead of them the cogon twisted and quivered intermittently.

"Hold low! Aim low!" the lieutenant kept warning.

But in volley fire there is always more sound and fury than effectiveness, even in an open field. Firing into this tangle of cogon could do no great good, especially if, as was probable, there were rocks, hummocks and ridges inside the notch behind which the wily Malanaos were lying. Dusk was settling, and now came the terrifying whisper that ammunition was low, that some of the rifles were already silent. With one part of their brains most of the men still expected nothing but death, still shrank in anticipation of the rush of the Malanaos, who would come roaring maniacally, swinging their deadly blades.

But now there was no danger of a stampede, for with the other and predominant half of their minds they leaned with reliance upon Lieutenant Lockard.

"Cease firing!"

It was a test of their trust in him, if ever a company were tested. For this was suicide, of course. But obediently each man ejected his discharged shell, loaded his piece, and to the wave of death that must now come, bowed his defenseless head. Entirely defenseless, for the lieutenant had not even given them "fix bayonets."

"Steady now! Keep down! Keep down!"

Now a few with very good hearing had their ears to the ground, trying to make out the meaning of a low but widespread rustling that was coming upon them from behind. Of those who heard it, some remembered what the lieutenant's mission had been in the Visayan camp, and the rest quivered with redoubled fears. But no one stirred.

"Steady! Steady! Steady!"

Something was coming—something! Two or three of the men looked around. In fairly good order the Visayan warriors came out of the cogon that had concealed their advance—that was concealing it still to the Malanaos. They were naked upward from the waist; their slender brown bodies bent forward; they had left their rifles behind, and each man had his curved blade ready. There were many of them. The center of their line covered the Americans, and the flanks reached out to invisibility in the grass.

They came silently. The first that most of the Americans knew of their allies was when they saw the brown men step over them, going into the notch.

But those who got a good look at any Visayan face saw deadly intention upon it. Certainly the Visayans had reason for wrath. Fresh from a review of a hundred years of oppression by the Malanaos, they had come to repel the treacherous attack upon them. By the narrowest of chances they had escaped killing the white *teniente*, who had come to explain to them the double treachery involved. Very close had they been to conflict with the power who offered them freedom, and only the Malanaos the cause. The Visayans liked better to work than to fight, but their blood was up, and the fanatic Malanaos themselves had never gone to a blood-letting with greater zeal.

The Visayans seemed to watch their center. Suddenly a chief who marched there flung up his creese, glowing crimson in the setting sun. At that, the center of the line bent inward on a run. The men on the flanks caught the movement from the others, and the whole line went forward silently.

"As you were. Lie fast! Lie fast!"

It seemed that Lieutenant Lockard snapped that order exactly at the instant that half a dozen Americans started up to follow the Visayans in. Muscle-obedience forced them down again, though they strained forward a little.

"Our part is arranged," said the lieutenant with a sudden weakness in his voice. "Besides—no unnecessary loss of life — always. Corporals, instruct your squads—let no one escape from the notch. The Visayans will not try—the Malanaos must not——"

He was speaking rapidly now, and with seeming difficulty.

"To the right and left, double your interval. First Sergeant Rodman," abruptly and loudly, "take charge of the com——"

Rodman, gulping convulsively at a dozen emotions, was at the lieutenant's side in an instant. The others, drawn irresistibly to look around as they crawled to right and left, saw that their officer had collapsed upon the ground. Rodman had his arms around the fallen man. He was lifting him, examining him. He waved his hand reassuringly.

A thin, shamed cheer arose from the men, as they settled down in their new positions, clear across the mouth of the notch.

Then they began to watch the cogon, peering intently through the tangle of it, trying to see something of the battle to the death that was beginning there. But they had to be content with what their ears gathered—cries of astonishment, fright, mad fury, scattered shots, the clang of steel against steel, the straining and scraping of feet; the sickening sound of hewn flesh and the cleaving of negroish skulls.

Once the fight got near enough so that they could see how the cogon writhed as if alive, and could hear how it crackled protestingly as it was smashed and trampled down. But not so near that they could distinguish friend from foe. And toward the last the fray was fiercest at the narrow end of the notch, where the Malanaos were trying to mount the rocks and flee into the hills beyond. Some of them may have succeeded in doing it.

Gradually the noise of the fighting died down. It ended about the time that complete darkness came to the notch, and when the Visayans came out with their wounded they left nothing but darkness and silence behind them.

THE Americans made camp where they lay. They had their wounded, too, though none dead nor dying; and those that were sound were glad enough to rest.

Lieutenant Lockard recovered sufficiently from his collapse to supervise the making of camp. Rodman remained first sergeant. The shamed and worried company caught something of the meaning of that; and when it was lined up to march the next morning, with its wounded on bamboo stretchers, it waited rather hopefully when the lieutenant ordered "at ease" and started to speak.

But he began ominously enough.

"I think it's only fair to let you know that this—er—affair will have to be reported to headquarters. Its importance demands that it be reported. I didn't know until this morning just how important it was—not until the Visayans informed me that they had found Datto Calbi's body among the dead, and that it was Datto Calbi's band which was destroyed. Some of you know who Datto Calbi was.

"With his death passes the greatest obstacle to peace, not only with the Visayans but with the Malanaos as well. Consequently headquarters will be delighted, and I hope—and expect—that headquarters will have a kind word for Company D. And I believe also——"

He hesitated a moment, then continued:

"You know, in the Army results count. That being true, and the results of your—voluntary hike being so satisfactory, perhaps headquarters will not be so particular about the details. If so, well—" he tried to smile but couldn't for bandages about his face—"perhaps it would be better not to clutter up the muster roll with them.

"You did well last night, kept your heads. You could have done more if it had been required, as much as any men in the world. But I think you will agree that discipline helped a little, and training—that you couldn't have done much as a mob. I think you've all learned a little since yesterday morning. I mean, I think *we've* all learned a little."

He stopped. There was one other thing he wanted to add, but he did not know quite how to word it; and, looking around at his men, he thought it might well remain unsaid. He had hinted it quite plainly enough in those last seven words. He turned to Sergeant Rodman. Here was chance of another hint.

"First sergeant, march off the company."

They started off "at ease," at a very slow route step, for there were the stretcher-bearers to consider, and also those who limped along painfully. The lieutenant himself was one of the latter. After a while he gave them "rest," so they could talk.

Which they did, casually and intermittently, about nothing that mattered much. They were feeling rather deeply yet. But presently the poet among them, mindful that there would soon come new men to Company D to replace the casualties, began tentatively revamping his rimes to suit changing times as some poets do, and presently hummed this altered stanza:

"Oh, whin ye meet our foine off-i-cer,
Salute, ye gumboot, and say, 'Yis, sir!'
Eyes to the front and hold up your hid,
Or by the Hivens ye'll wish ye did,

"For he's that fightin' fool *teniente*,
Commander-in-chief of Company D."

And at that, in spite of his bandages, Lieutenant Lockard did manage to achieve a rather ferocious smile.

THROUGH FIRE

by Raymond S. Spears

Author of "Fretful Muncher," "The Shellers," etc.

LATTICE SKY stood in a plain that seemed as boundless as the ocean. No matter in what direction one looked, there was only the slightly undulating horizon with no mountain, not even the occasional smoke of a locomotive, to give promise of anything in the beyond.

This was, however, famous pasture land. Here cattle had ranged in herds, and some few could be seen in small bunches at intervals. But the old water-hole at Lattice Sky was now covered with a scum of colorful hues that hid the murky depth of crude oil floating on what had been for ages water which was not too salty for cattle to drink, nor even for humans accustomed to absorb water from alkalis to meet their requirements.

From Lattice Sky a roadway led straight northward, and along this roadway there was a pipe of small size, but high pressure. Through this pipe squirted what was more precious than water—a high-grade pool of oil had been struck right beside that water-hole—and this ran up over the horizon and on to a refinery to which the oil flow now belonged.

The oil pool was not large, speaking in square miles. A million or two shares of stock had been sold by companies on the strength of the fact that they were drilling within ten or twenty miles of this pool, but, except for the several rigs within the township and a half covering the water-pool ranch, not one had yielded ever a smell of oil—except as a few surreptitious barrels full, borrowed in town, had been dumped into the "dusters" to encourage investment.

The boom had come, blown, and then burst, leaving only the original prospectors who had wildcatted the water-hole and who were wealthy now beyond their dreams. Five men had come, through thick and thin, down the years to this water-hole. It belonged when they arrived to the Skull Brand Outfit, which in turn was owned by Tippet Cage, a tall, slim, pale-eyed man who said little, and who knew enough to exact his eighth in the contract that accompanied the offer to drill his land for oil.

They went down sixteen hundred feet on their resources; they borrowed to go down some more; the last eighty feet they went down on some old fence-posts, sage-brush and anything they could pick up around that would burn. When they blew in, all five of the men were hungry and faint with weariness. They hadn't had enough to eat for days. But they had smelled oil in the well, and seen it on the water out of the hole. Two fainted; one went sick at his stomach; the other two fell upon each other and wept, with their arms around each other's necks.

Their hard times were over: even Tippet Cage, cold and suspicious of them, now relaxed and invited them over to the big house for supper. They told him that, while they didn't object to making him wealthy, they decidedly didn't care to eat with him—they would rather starve first!

CAGE went back to his ranch. He had been suspicious of the oil-rig crowd. Before he signed the lease with them he had had it approved by a good lawyer down in the Nation. While their money lasted he had sold them water from the water-hole. Then he had advanced them water on spec. For a time he had even given them things to eat. But for some time back he had forbidden them the privilege of anything but the water. He had watched them lest they go out on the grazing-lands and pick up a calf or heifer. If he had caught them doing it he would have rounded them up and taken them over the horizon to jail. Perhaps he would have shot them up and buried them.

Now Cage went back to his ranch with the realization that his acres, his herds of cattle, his wealth and his grim sense of justice were despicable in the eyes of the five men who had not once flinched in the common purpose of making them all rich off of his land. He had contributed the land; he had even contributed sustenance; when he thought of adding that he had even given the outfit water, he couldn't do it.

He knew that he was acting according to some rules laid down by the examples of mighty successful men in the arid lands. He could give name and location of a lot of water-holes which had been homesteaded in the old days and which were now fenced in and guarded, unused, in order that away off yonder, somewhere, the owners might have that water in case something happened to their own springs and they must move their herds from the dead water to a living well.

He sat before his fireplace, which he kept burning in chill weather, burning mesquite roots hauled in a big automobile truck from away over toward the southwest. He held his hands over the fire, chilled more by the resentment of this domain for years. Every passer-by had come begging for a drink of water; he had heard stray cattle, out of his brands, walking around the big water-hole, bellowing in the night for a drink; and he had seen them die because he wouldn't give them a drink.

He had laughed at home-seeking outfits who came along in prairie schooners looking for lands to take-up. He couldn't remember how many had asked him if he would let them have water should they go out there on that bare land to make a homestead. If the inquirers had shown resentment or even surprize at his refusal he often sent them on down the trail to do the forty-eight miles in that direction without water—it was farther in any other direction.

Even in the later days, when the passers-by drove automobiles, the Skull Brand ranch was exceedingly important. Not one in a hundred cars that passed by but stopped there for radiator water, to buy gasoline, to buy supplies—or to pitch a tent against the fence. The gate was always locked. Huge, ugly dogs kept people from trying to climb the barbed-wire entanglement. It had pleased Cage's vanity to have people hail the house respectfully and beg for favors.

Cage was hurt by the contempt of the men who had come to him with a business proposition which flattered the pride and awakened even a greater avarice in his heart. They had asked no favors till they had spent their last dollar and borrowed to their utmost at ruinous rates of interest. He had enjoyed their resourcefulness, their steadfastness, their attempts to bargain when he wanted them to beg. They had won through.

"They'll be square—they've be'n square!" he told himself. "I pressed 'em too hard, and now—now——"

He cursed himself. Too late he realized the bitterness of his own soul. For years he had been just a cowboy. He had worked for some of the best of them. He knew alkali when it ate the skin off his lips, hands, and made his very lungs raw. He knew blizzards—northers—and he had taken cattle over the Routt Forest trail when he thought the cold would kill them all.

The men he had admired had been cold, implacable, grim and desperate. They had made their piles by wit against wit, merciless use of advantage and through cruel grasp with power. When his own ambition was stirred by unbelievable hope he had dared, suffered and gained advantage. Having seen much hang on the turn of a card or the first blow or on a good shot, little things had come to mean everything to him.

"An' they mout of be'n friends of mine!" he whispered to himself. "An' they won't eat with me now—not when they're hongry—starved cruel!"

He didn't know it—perhaps he never would know it—but all his years in the wide spaces had been lonesome years. His very thirst and hunger for wealth had been desire of human companionship and admiration. Now five good sports, square-toed, hard-living, successful men wouldn't eat with him, because he hadn't exactly treated them right when he had the chance. It made him mad!

"I'll fix 'em! I'll fix 'em!" he told himself.

He went out to see. They had choked down the flow of oil. A lot of it had run over into his water-hole. From that day no one could drink its water. In a rage the ranchman reared down on the hungry toilers. He told them they'd pay for the ruined water! They laughed at him, Crelens, the spokesman saying—

"This is all provided for in the contract, old man!"

It was true, as he could read with his own eyes now that he looked. At one stroke all his cattle country was ruined. He was dispossessed, and he had instantly to drive away his herds, selling them or grazing them down in the Sinking River country.

He was a wealthier man by far; but he was lonelier; he loved his old ranch. Now it was ruined. He couldn't boss cowboys around, because he had no cattle to keep them busy. He let them go. He had a Mexican to do odd jobs around the place, while the fellow's wife did the cooking. The added net figures to his income, as the oil men plied the letter of their contract lease, erecting rigs on all sides of the ranch buildings except the five acres happily exempt, brought him consolation. The Mexican knew another Mexican who could bring in certain questionable liquors. Cage, who had never been much for drinking, now began to let go.

The riches of the under-earth were being drained and pumped away to the northward over the pipe-line. Not one of the five men had remained on the scene of their good fortune. They had "gone back home," to enjoy the wealth which was now all theirs. They left behind them hired men to look after the work. Since the water-hole was all ruined, the oil men put a number of big automobile water-tanks on the road, bringing the water from sweet wells which they sank along the Sinking River. This water was pumped into a big tank forty feet high and there distributed around among the employees of the oil company.

Tippet Cage had to send his Mexican to buy water for his own ranch. He paid seventy-five cents a barrel for it. Every time he drank a dipperful or looked into a coffee-cup or carried a pailful out to his horses he remembered the days when he had been lord of the water-hole. It made him heart-sick. At night he would dream he heard cattle out of his brand bellowing around the fence; he would awaken with a start, thinking to go out and open wide the gate for the poor brutes. Then he would discover that he was the thirsty one.

He went to New Orleans; he went to El Paso; he went to Muskogee, Memphis and St. Louis; he went away up in the northwest, in Utah and Nevada, where he had been a cowboy; the land lost its savor, if not its salt. He would return to his old ranch, guided to it at night by the lights away up on top of the derricks, and by day, when the wooden frames standing against the sky looked like a lattice, singularly beautiful in the geometrical proportions. Cage tried to hate the place, yet loved it; he could never forget the courage, the endurance and the privation which had been suffered by the strong men who had gambled into that pot-hole of subterranean fortune.

The tradition of his meanness to the oil men left him isolated. He would not stoop to purchase any favor of hirelings. He had been boss himself, and knew how to handle cattle men. Cowboys, off yonder in their bunk-rooms, would tell of the Skull Brand ranch, how things were done there in the old days. Few of the ordinary riders ever had eaten at Tippet Cage's table; many had never been even in the main house; but the grub-pile had always been good, never pinched, and none could complain, except poor workers, who did not remain long where so much skill and constant toil were demanded.

Cage recalled his days of command and importance with stinging regrets. The thought in a dream would awaken him and keep him awake for hours. He had worked with the men when the need came. The cattle would not wander too far from the water-hole except in a storm. After the storm, he would ride forth even in bad snow to bring in the strays. He would go with the drive to the railroad. Whenever a thunder-storm threatened at night and there was danger of bunched cattle stampeding, he won the admiration and respect of his men by riding out himself to help hold the cattle, circling the herd and singing to them the familiar. "Way—hay—way," soothing the nervous beasts.

His occupation was completely gone now. The oil men had their revenge. They had made him wealthier, but they had ruined him too. Once let the word go forth that a man is too mean to live—especially out in the open spaces where such things are supposed not to be—as a matter of personal inclination rather than as a forgivable matter of business, and it drives the pitiable wretch harder than ever horse-thief was pressed.

Tippet Cage saw no hope in his condition. He was whipped. He was held by a grip stronger than any he had ever inflicted on his own victims. He did one thing to satisfy his pride. He put up a water-tank and hired a driver to haul water in an oil-truck to keep it filled. Once more he was master of his own drink! The thing gave him immense satisfaction. It was the only ease he had in his isolation.

At last a wet season kept the grass growing all Summer. The grazing had never been better. Around the edges of the great pasture a few farmers—mere homesteaders—had cattle out on the free range. These wandered a good deal, not being used to unfenced lands. They appeared in pitiful little bunches where great herds had formerly been scattered. They were pretty to the old rancher's eyes. Had he saved his water-hole, his own cattle and grazers, brought in from the Texas coast marshes, would have been belly-deep by the thousands in that wonderful crop of hay.

The rain blew over at last. Autumn came in hot, and two or three hot winds blew across the land. The range that had been green turned suddenly tawny. The grass was still good to eat, but it was withered.

Cage mourned as never before. He would have given his millions for a good herd to range that grazing and to restore his water-hole.

He dreamed that he was beginning all over again, starting his ranch and being kind to passers-by. They were hard dreams to bear. He awakened, realizing to what his loneliness was due. He did not relax. He pressed his lips, squared his jaw, and gazed coldly with his pale eyes—the kind of eyes that mean man-killing if occasion offers. What did he care about hired men anyhow? Besides, these men were hired by the absent oil-drillers, who were far away and wealthy now.

ONE night he dreamed that the old gang were coming back, coming on the run. Something was the matter. He didn't know what it was. Nobody would tell him. He thought he was running up and down, trying to hear the news, but it was impossible to find a man good enough or friendly enough to explain.

Cage grew angrier and angrier. He finally stopped pleading; and, grabbing his gun, he started out to force the fools to tell him what the excitement was all about.

At this moment he awakened. He was standing in the middle of the floor of his room. In his right hand he had his old forty-five revolver. It was dark. But he heard excitement. Whistles of boilers, which supplied steam for wells that had to be pumped, were blowing. He heard the distant cries of people, a weird, terrible sound in the dark.

The wind was whistling, too, cold and bleak, through the guy-wires and the long lines that netted the air among the derricks. One of the big iron chunks that had been hung on a guy wire, to tighten it for lack of turn-buckles, was swinging in the dark like a gong. Faint electric lights in the settlement east of the ranch beyond the water-hole, glowed, as did the lights among the surrounding derricks.

Cage cursed under his breath, wondering what had stampeded the human herd. The habit of old returned to him. He dressed himself, walked out to his stable and saddled his horse. A minute or two later he rode out of the gateway and turned down the road toward town. He looked ahead, and with the open-country habit he turned to look along the horizon, too—a horizon, the view of which was obstructed by near-by pump-shacks, boiler-shacks, derricks and all the rest. Away over toward the west he saw a kind of glow. He stopped, turned in his saddle to look and studied the just-visible color.

He galloped then into the settlement. Shouts were in all directions. Impatiently he thrust his way among the gathering humans to the main office. He stalked into the building, which was aglow. Superintendent Cayosel was standing there, surrounded by foremen, some of whom couldn't speak English, white and shaken.

"What's the matter?" Cage demanded. "What's the excitement?"

"Big Paster telephones there's a prairie fire coming east—heading this way, spreading and—and—" Cayosel gasped.

"Fifty miles an hour!" another man cried. "We got to run for it— I——"

He broke for the door. Cage made one swing and one swipe with his fist. The fellow's feet left the floor three feet as he caved into the corner. The superintendent broke into tears. He was a friend of one of the original five—a Down Easter, a dandy at oil work, but not much in such an emergency as now was at hand.

Tippet Cage looked around him. These men had all been summoned by telephone. They were the foremen and bosses of the outfit, but the girl who gave the alarm was telephone central. Cage said:

"You men bring all the automobiles, trucks and cars up past my ranch on the west line. Bring all the shovels, all the men you can pick up. Fill the water-tanks out of the main supply-tank—now hustle!"

The order was interpreted by those who didn't exactly understand. Then Cage walked to the telephone girl.

"Put my order in for a telephone, Miss Lenning! Please."

"Why—yes, Mr. Cage!"

"I'm leaving my horse hitched out in front, if you have to go. Don't wait too long. Tell 'em—outside there—that we're doing all we can."

As Cage went out on the front porch he saw a big, powerful runabout down a side alley, with lights burning and a motor running. He saw some one just climbing into it. The rancher made a run for it and jumped in beside the driver, who was starting the car.

"All right," Cage said; "turn to the left at the corner."

"But—but I'm going out on the—the north trail!" the man exclaimed nervously.

"No, ye ain't, superintendent!" Cage replied, poking his big forty-five in the man's side. "Turn and drive where I tell ye—and I'll take this!"

He pocketed the fellow's own big automatic. They went out to where five cars had already arrived, driven by men who were unafraid, whatever wits they might have in an emergency. Scores of men were shortly available. Word had gone forth, and the discipline of a strong mind, knowing what to do, brought them to their job.

"Now, boys," Cage said, "we'll run short fires down-wind, and you stop 'em. Then we'll backfire up-wind and let it go! Come on!"

It was as simple as that. They turned the sod; they started little back-fires to burn against the wind away from the trenches; they ran fires down the wind to road-ruts worn along the front of the oil district, by processions of automobiles, and, as fast as they could come, by the big water-carrying tanks, which with faucets opened wet down the grass inside the fire-line among the buildings. They even had a big sprinkler out, and wet down the sod with it—and the strip of wet stopped the little leeward fires from spreading down-wind into the settlement.

A score of little fires flared in the dark. Shouts and cries sounded above the whine of the growing wind. The smoke blew down-wind into the faces of the balk-line, starting other fires toward the greasy waste where Lattice Sky stood with lights high and low among the forest of derricks.

The gaunt figure of Cage strode up and down among the fire-makers and among the fire-fighters. As he raced he would look westward where the pale glow was growing brighter, whence a sniff of smoke blew into his nostrils—smoke from afar, with a different, air-strained odor in it, as he claimed. The front of the oil township was nearly five miles wide.

Cage ran his men out in groups. He gave them strips of acres to burn and check. He held Superintendent Cayosel to the chauffeur job till the fellow's fears begot a kind of courage of desperation and pride—and then Cayosel sent down the line for some light gasoline-truck pumps, and, running these alongside the awkward water-tanks, rigged suction hose and nozzle, and with a single run wet down a rod-width swath of grass instead of the mere faucet-and-bucket foot-wide line.

The coming fire brought its own blasts of wind. The fire burned off wreaths of grass, tangles of it, and sucked them a hundred feet into the air and carried them in white flames far ahead, where they fell and started more fires at the grass-roots. Chips from the departed herds were sucked up in white-hot embers and hissed down the wind half a mile.

While he worked, Tippet Cage picked men who did a dozen men's work that night; he sent some with gangs to scatter among the derricks, to fight that rain of fire out of the sky, where it fell in the mud-oil and wherever there was sign of fire. He gave them guns and pistols from the hardware store—and told them to use their bullets, or the butts, according to the nature of things. And out of that night men came with cut heads, and two were shot down.

It seemed as if the fire-break burn was only half-done when the blast of flame and smoke swept down upon the fighters. All stooped low; but few flinched in that hottest moment. Then as if through the very heart of the fire a breath of cool wind swept down, and the fighters straightened up with a yell—the fire had jumped from the last of the tall grass over the fire-break. They turned and rushed down into the oil-splashes. There in a hundred places a hundred flames had sprung up.

Cool men scattered the fighters. They swarmed to wipe out the flaring, leaping, gaseous blazes—and somehow, with extinguishers and shovels, wet blankets and all the expedients, managed to fight it all down, except that the old water-hole with its inches-deep scum of oil flared up with a roar and burst of gas. None could get to this thing to fight it—but the old cattle wallows around the edge with their caked mud and bare earth held the flames there, near the middle of the field, while the nerve-racked men scattered and watched for any flame or flash that might spread through the whole field and undo what had been done to save it.

The grass fire swept around the town. The fight carried on down the flanks, kept it from side-swiping in on the field. They saw the menace ride on the wind into a waste of alkali and sage miles to the east, where it went out, and nothing remained but here and there a red glow where some homesteader had dared to build a shack, contrary to all sense and reason.

Tippet Cage walked down to the big office and found the telephone girl with her morning relief and the day girls all there.

"I don't reckon you'll need the hoss," Cage observed, "so I'll jes' ride 'im out. Course, you can borry him any time."

"Oh, thank you!" Miss Lanning exclaimed gratefully.

Too embarrassed to say more, Cage hurried away to his ranch. The Mexican heard him riding up, knew the sound of the boofs and had the gate open for Cage to enter. Cage went into the main house and rubbed saddle-grease over the scorched and blistered places on his face and hands, and on his shoulders, where a chip had fallen and burned a hole through his woolen shirt.

"Huh!" be grinned. "I mussed myself all up tonight! But millin' steers an' humans ain't so dif'rent! Sho——"

Old times had given him no greater exhilaration. He rejoiced, while he cursed his smarts and aches. Tough old nut that he was, he would not sleep for the satisfaction he felt in having had such a night as that. Indeed, he soon did go to sleep, dead tired and happy. Not in years had he been so well pleased.

Before sunrise he was up again. He ate his breakfast, went out and looked at the blackened plain. The sky was cloudless; the air was as clear as crystal; the wind sweet and gentle, growing balmy.

He walked his horse along the fire-line and saw a shovel here and there which had been lost in the dark and excitement. Not another man was out there to see the sunrise on the ashes of the deadly peril they had all survived. He rode clear around the edge of the unburned strip, nearly thirty miles. Just so he had ridden along the trails and around the tracks where stampeded cattle had raced of old, studying the lay of the land, the looks of the trouble, so that he could figure as much as any one could on what crazed cattle would do the next time.

AS HE rode through town that afternoon women smiled on him; children pointed at him; men hailed him. His face, set by years and years of steadfast self-repression, crinkled and cracked, but it would not relax. Besides, he was all blistered, his eyebrows singed off and his hair burned short. He stared in wonder, but otherwise gave no sign at that coming of greetings. He trembled all over when a group of pretty young school-girls looked at him shyly and giggled.

He rode home in a hurry and in confusion. He went to his fireplace and sat before it with his hands stinging in the heat, they were so badly scorched—but he liked it. He didn't feel half so embarrassed being in the fire as thinking about those fool people around town, hollering at him, and those girls giggling.

He hung around home for a week. Every time the Mexican started to speak to him he jumped and kicked him out of the door. When the woman came in, taciturn and immobile-faced, bringing dinner or supper or whatever, he paid no attention to her. Thus he was wholly unprepared when Crelens, spokesman of the five wildcatters, came in with his four companions and partners.

"Howdy, Cage!" Crelens greeted. "I see we come close to going up in the smoke. Cayosel says he lost his nerve, and everybody else lost their nerve, and you come down on 'em with a forty-five and a complete dictionary of cuss words and all the fire-fighting ideas——"

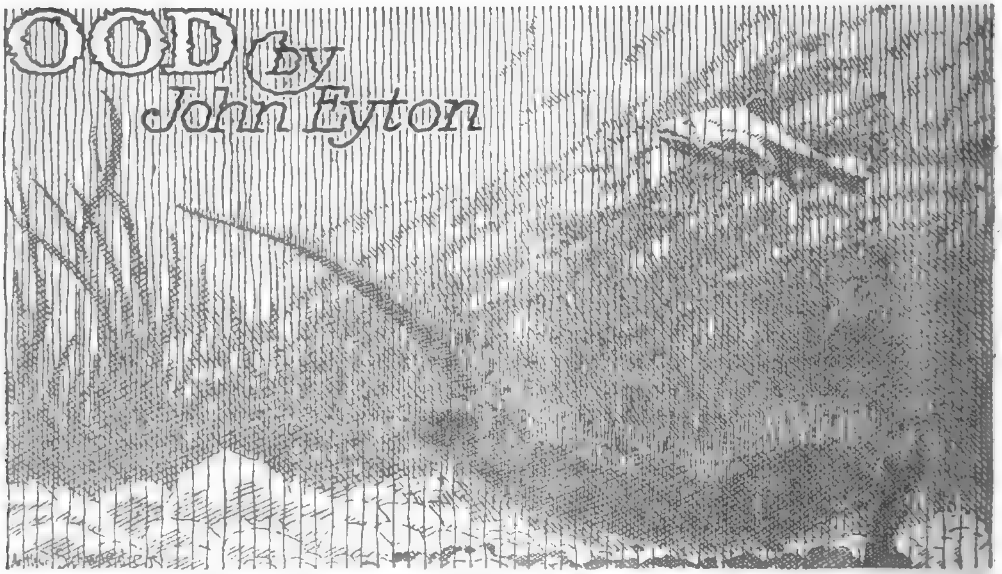
"All but one," Cage interrupted. "Cayosel brought out a lot of little dinky wagon pumps—they *saved* us!"

"Oh—they did, did they? All right! We won't dispute you. I expect we're all right around here—don't need a chief prairie fireman around anyhow, from the looks of the grass. We're running out to California, sort of sporting around and having a good time. Thought we'd drop in and see if you don't want to go along?"

Tippet Cage started to speak, but made a false start. He blinked, and after fighting the impulse a moment wiped his sleeve across his face.

"Got my eyes full of cinders!" he exclaimed impatiently: "'Course—'course—if you—could stand me! Why—I—I—I ain't been to the Coast—nor nowhere lately——"

"Fine! Say—we'll have a dandy time!" Crelens exclaimed.



Author of "The Holy Tiger."

ONE July morning, in the lower Himalayas, a young otter followed his parents—a fierce old warrior and his lithe lady—from a cave in the bank of a river. The parents slipped instantly into the pool below; but he, in the pride and assurance that six months experience of life brings, stopped behind to look round. With his head up, his whiskers quivering, his brown eyes bright, and his little ears just cocked from the smooth curve of his head, he looked every inch a king, surveying his kingdom.

His puppyhood was all behind him, and from the tip of his broad rudder to the tip of his flat black nose he was perfectly knit. Already, he possessed the power of moving silently through water and over land. Already, he knew the bottom of the river as well as he knew the beach. And, if he had not actually killed his fish, he had so often seen his parents do it for him that in his dreams he never had any difficulty in accounting for a succession of arrow-like golden mahseer and in conveying them to the round rock across the pool, which served as a dining-table—there to dispose of them with equal ease.

Something of this self-confidence showed in his look, as he stood now in the mouth of the cave. Though in build he did not differ perceptibly from his English cousin, in expression he differed markedly. From the very cock of his head it was clear that, though little larger than a ferret, he feared nothing—nothing on the earth or above the earth or under the water. There was a boldness, an insouciance in his look which seemed to take in the whole world at a glance and to find nothing in it to be afraid of. His English cousin would have listened for the note of a horn, or the scutter and cry of shaggy hounds, or the step of a man. But Ood, the otter of India, has few enemies.

It was this sense of power and of freedom that showed itself when he stood to scan his kingdom.

It was a kingdom to be proud of—a rocky gorge nursing a sparkling river, deep and shallow by turns at the bidding of the boulders. Shallows above, shallows below, and at his feet a clear pool, with the sand ten feet down showing pale green, and here and there the glint of a wheeling fish caught by the sun. This was the home pool. The cave was a few yards up the bank, formed in a fissure of rock and roofed by the roots of a tree. A little track, scored by many footprints in the red earth, led to the water.

Satisfied that, like all his days, this was perfect, he gave a sniff of joy, pattered down the track, and slid soundlessly into the pool to join his father and mother.

Then, in single file, swimming as easily as fish, three gray shadows—first two big, then a small—made their way up-stream toward the waterfall. Sometimes they would dive in succession, or would wheel and chase one another in play as they went.

II

ALTHOUGH the day, in its perfection, had seemed to Ood much as other days, it was by no means an ordinary day. In more senses than one it was a day of destiny.

Higher up in the hills the monsoon had already broken, and here too, long before the morning was out, the clouds began to bank and blacken. A haze came over the sun, glassing the water, and causing the fish to flap sluggishly on the surface. Perhaps the parents noted the chance offered by the basking fish, or perhaps they had already come to the conclusion that it was time for Ood to prove his independence—in any case they gave him the sign to hunt for himself, and, with their heads just above water, lay and watched him.

Ood had not dreamed in vain. Following his parents' tactics, he slipped silently in at the head of a long pool, and swam deep, without leaving a bubble to betray him, to the tail of the pool. There he lay, as to the manner born, like a stone till he could see—clear between him and the light—the dark bodies and transparent fins of a basking shoal.

Then, like a flash, he was among them.

In a couple of seconds he was lying on the beach, contemplating the central object of all his dreams—a copper-colored mahseer, bright yet with the sheen of life, but gasping now with fluttering gills. His paw lay across it and he felt it quiver in a last effort to regain the water. Then he bent down and bit off its head.

After consuming the head, he browsed delicately on the body, neatly ripping the firm flesh from the bones, and never pausing till he had licked the last drop of blood off the hot stones. Though he had daily fed on fish of the same size and shape, none had tasted like this one of his own catching. In the joy of it, he quite forgot those who had made the event possible. Indeed, despairing of gratitude, his parents had departed and were fishing the next pool. Had he looked down, he might have seen his sire's dark head bobbing toward the bank, and, instead of whiskers, a bright fish adorning his mouth.

But Ood felt lazy. With something like a sigh of content he rolled over in the sand and let the warmth steal over him. Soon he was asleep.

III

OOD had seen much in his short life—a fact which, as his manner showed, he fully appreciated. But there was one trifling matter of which he had no experience—rain. He had never seen or felt or been aware of rain. Now rain was destined not only to catch him napping, but to revolutionize his existence. Yet he slept.

The sky grew darker, the air more listless. The old otters, generally so alert, seemed to surrender themselves to the mood of the day, for they floated lazily down-stream and left their offspring, in his new-found independence, to follow as best he might. As they reached the cave a great gray cloud drifted over from the next valley, till its fringes mantled the waterfall. Then came a little whirling wind, puckering the water, and a huge fish rose and wallowed, as if to greet the rain. Hardly had the rings died away when the sky seemed to come down in one driving mass of rain, and the water to rise and meet it in a thousand jets. The rustling song of the river was drowned in the drumming roar of rain drops.

Then Ood woke up.

The world, he saw, had changed. It was dark and distorted, like the world which he was accustomed to seeing from the bottom of a deep pool. Strange, too—he was not in the water, and yet his coat was running with wet. Had he dived under the waterfall itself, he could not have been wetter. But the strangeness did not stop there. There was something in the air—a sense of exhilaration. No thought of his parents, or of the warm cave, or even of that first fish could compete with this tremendous revel of rain. New life had come down from the sky, and he—Ood—was the lord of the universe.

He plunged exulting into the pool, and began to swim madly round and round it. The water felt as if it had wings, and he was so intent on his orgy of swimming that he did not notice how it was rising. Little by little it crept over the beach, till pool and shallows were all one, till rocks were covered. Then a great wave of brown and white, fed by all the hill streams for twenty miles, came whirling and swooping down. It caught Ood into its folds and bore him along as if he had been nothing.

Over and over he rolled, now on one side of the river, now on the other; through the home pool, tormented now with rain; past the cave, hidden by a red spout of water; past the dining rock, where the waves leaped like flames; through a narrow causeway; over a second waterfall; down racing rapids; then, into unfamiliar waters, where a new river joined the old. Now the hills were black with trees. Trees trailed in the water, or fought to keep their places, and now and then a branch was torn away to whirl and dance on the stream.

Ood had no breath left in him, and no power. All his suppleness and strength had been numbed, and it was all he could do to keep his head above water and his eyes open. Yet, strangely enough, the exhilaration had not left him. He was happy in this marvelous adventure, and he was by no means afraid.

Occasionally, as he was spun round, he caught a glimpse of a brightness beyond the pall of cloud—a square of green far down beyond the gorge, with a slanting ray of the sun on it, and a silver ribbon of water in the midst of it. He could not know it, but he was seeing the plains for the first time, and the silver ribbon was the Ganges, bound on a course of two thousand miles seaward.

The sunlighted square widened. Now he was heading for the very gates of the hills—two immense buttresses of rock, with a steep fall between them. A mass of tumbling white water was just ahead of him.

Suddenly he was picked up and flung. A mighty roar beat on his ears, while spray hid the world. His last sensation was of spinning head over heels—over and over and over. Then, with a jerk and a bang, he was in a new world altogether—quiet by comparison, and solid, and painful.

It was some time before he could recover his breath and longer still before he opened his eyes. Pain in the past had been represented by his father ducking him roughly or smacking him or making the parental teeth felt, and a shake or a wriggle had dismissed pain. Now he felt as if a hundred monster fathers had concentrated on him and inflicted a pain that no shake or wriggle could dismiss. But, dimly within him was a feeling of surprize, almost of humiliation, for he knew that no number of fathers could have used him as he had been used by water—his own element. Water, of all things, had beaten him and bullied him. His own kingdom had risen up and chastened him. There was the sting.

However, he was alive—and if a cat has nine lives, an otter has nineteen—and capable of kicking. He gave an experimental kick. It hurt. He stirred his head. That hurt too. Then he opened his eyes. Even that hurt, but he kept them open.

He saw that he was lying on a little ledge of sand between swaying trees and water. At his back, where swayed the trees, was solid land, clothed in jungle, green. Before his face, as far as his eyes could see, there was water—water jumping angrily at him as if to pluck him from the shelf of sand into the water that was racing and swirling past him; water turned to a sheet of blood by the flaming sunset; and past desolate islands, which yesterday had been jungle for beasts to walk in, more water still. The eager flood had swept into fifty channels, as if to explore the routes or to play a while before joining once more the serious stream that was rolling for the sea. All the lower parts of the forest were awash, and still the water was rising. A tongue of it licked Ood.

With a squeak of pain he rolled over toward the stony bank at his back. Another roll—and another. Now he was under the bank. He tried to climb it, but fell back—yet it was no steeper in reality than the track leading to his old home. He had to crawl along in the hope of finding an easy passage from the prison that had saved him. At last he came to a cleft in the wall of the bank, which rats had used in the past. Up this he crept, till he found himself in a narrow little crevice well above the river, made strong by a tissue of roots. Farther he could not go, so he licked himself to sleep.

IV

THERE was no exhilaration in Ood's next awakening. He was an orphan. He was hungry, and cramped, and cold. He missed the warm contact of his mother, and his father's summons to be up and fishing. He might have stayed in his crevice and died, had not a glint of the sun stolen in to revive him with a promise of day. It made him blink his eyes. It made him eventually poke his head out and survey the world. But it was no longer a kingdom that he surveyed.

The home gorge had been familiar, because it had been bounded. The new world was unfamiliar, and unbounded. True, the hills new-washed and green, towered above him, with flecks of cloud still clinging to the trees; but there was no end to them. Right and left, they stretched in a solid wall forever—and, to the south, trees and water unending.

Yet the sun was out—pale and misty, but undeniably out. The air was fresh. And he felt hungry. There came into his head a tantalizing picture—a coppery fish kicking convulsively on the sand, to be subdued by a blow of his paw. He looked dubiously at the water below him. Fish! The idea of fish in that murky swirl was absurd. He would have to seek out other water.

With a shake of his head, he clambered through the roots onto the top of the bank, paused to stretch himself, and, proceeding by short dashes, pattered through wet grass into the undergrowth beyond, where the trunks of tall trees rose from a carpet of low shrubs.

There were innumerable little tracks and paths in the undergrowth, and he constantly encountered tell-tale smells. Deer, great and small, had been down to drink, and a leopard—he knew that pungent trail—had followed the deer. There were strange scents, too, which did not belong to the hills—one in particular which led to black beasts rooting and grunting among the leaves. These he avoided, and plunged deeper into the wood. Presently he came on a clearing and was crossing it when he suddenly came face to face with a bright little bird, with a red comb and golden neck, picking for insects.

He paused, one leg up, uncertain as to what to do, but the bird shrieked at him and fled. Then he passed a porcupine, intent on its own urgent business of enlarging a hole in the ground. Evidently he had hit on a populous neighborhood, but he had no time to reflect on this aspect of it, for suddenly the ground dipped, and he smelled—ahead of him this time—water.

He knew the quality—the rich but somewhat stale smell which is associated with standing-pools and green slime. It was not over-hopeful, but beggars can not be choosers, and he trotted forward, only to jump backwards with a squeak of pain. He had dived nose forward into a cane-brake.

There is nothing more innocent in appearance than a cane-brake, curtained with its great, cool fronds on their graceful stalks. Silent and intensely green, haunted by brilliant butterflies and laborious black and yellow spiders, it masquerades as a very haven of peace. But the elephant, for all his thick skin, will not face it. The bear, if he blunders into it, is likely to squeal. And the tiger must shut his eyes and flatten himself, if he is to gain the security beyond.

For the innocent, graceful fronds conceal an armory of wicked spikes, inches long, which tend to make the society beyond the barrier of the cane-brake exclusive.

However, the smell and the call of water was strong, and Ood persevered. Finally he found a tunnel made by a twenty-foot python in twenty years of journeying from sunlight to shade, and was thus able to walk in gaily where elephants feared to tread.

Once through the dark alley, he came on a very peaceful scene—a by-gone bed of the river. The streams of the hills had failed it, turning to the new bed, and even yesterday's spate had passed it undisturbed. A single spring welled out of a bank of reeds at the head of the reach—which extended about a hundred yards—and gave a certain slow life to the lazy green water. A bar of sunlight revealed a dense cloud of dancing flies. Blue and red dragonflies skimmed and hung over the surface, and a flash of ruby and turquoise showed that the kingfisher thought the place worth while. Ood stole forward to make a closer inspection.

His father had instilled the lesson that dull water makes dull fish, but apart from the quality of the water the place had undeniable advantages—sand banks, for instance, and holes, trellised with roots, in the bank. There were hunting piers and dining-tables ready to hand, and no sign of occupation—only a few old logs lying on the sand, half in, half out of the water, and, at the far end, the motionless coil of the sleeping python which had provided him with a passage. Making a mental note anent the avoidance of that particular corner, Ood jumped down on to the nearest spit of sand and, in the shadow of one of the logs of wood, watched for the appearance of a fish. All his optimism had returned

SUDDENLY he stiffened, and his eyes went red. He prepared to launch himself in a dive, only waiting the psychological moment when the fish should turn and give him a broadside chance. He had seen a dimple in the water first—far out; then, the flicker of a thin tail breaking the surface; then, nearer, a glint of gold; lastly a black nose searching at the edge of the sand and absorbing a beetle. Just the fish to make a meal!

Then, at the very moment of action, a most unaccountable thing happened.

The log of wood came to life. There was an explosive squelch in the mud, and a sound like a deep sigh. The fish fled. Ood started back and looked at the log in amazement.

It was heaving from side to side—churning up the water. It had a leg. It had an eye—a wicked little eye that held his—held his——

Swish! Bang!

In one indescribable instant the log had disclosed a mouthful of long yellow teeth and a gigantic tail, while he himself had tumbled head over heels into the water, dived, dodged, looped and dived till his nose had hit the opposite bank. As he had fled he had had a jumbled vision of that slashing tail and of clouds of mud, and a sense of being followed. For the first time in his life, he had been afraid.

He scrambled out into the grass. Looking back, he saw that the water round the spit of sand was still bubbling and heaving, and that a trail of mud lay across the pool.

Suddenly a black snout nosed in the grass at his feet. Ood took to his heels, and did not stop till he came to the reed bank at the head of the pool.

For the third time in two days he had been caught napping. Things were certainly not what they seemed to be—least of all, logs.

He looked pensively at the other logs on other spits of sand. Three were motionless, but, even as he looked, one slid into the water; another crept into the grass; and a third snored.

He determined that of all things on land or in water, he would avoid logs of wood. He had not heard of crocodiles.

But where was he to go? Below was deep water, and he already associated deep water with treacherous logs. Above, a solid reed bed.

He listened intently, in doubt as to his direction. Then from behind the reed bed, clear above the hum of the flies, came that most familiar and welcome sound—the tinkle of running water on a stony bed. The reed bed was evidently not after all the home of a hidden spring, but a curtain. There was hope beyond.

Half-swimming, half-walking, he pushed his way through the reeds, and touched bank. Up he scrambled. Then his heart leaped within him.

He was looking up-stream on to a pool—but a pool of a very different order from the one which he had left. A tiny spring, untouched by the rain, fed it with a glittering cascade which bounded over mossy rocks. A great gnarled tree overshadowed it, through whose branches the sunlight stole, dappling the water with gold and revealing a basking shoal and a mist of flies. Amber sand showed in the depths, and there was not a log of wood to be seen.

But it was neither the running water, nor the presence of fish, not even the absence of logs, that caused Ood's heart to leap within him. There, on a cape of sand which ran out into the pool and formed the best fishing pier he had ever seen, was standing—all unconscious—his destiny, cast in his own image, but finer and more demure. She was regarding the water pensively, and beside her lay the half-finished carcass of a fish. A pang of jealousy shot through him, as he marked the size of that fish, but it was instantly succeeded by a more generous emotion, as she fell to preening herself. A shred of sunlight played on her soft head.

Ood glowed. The buffets and bruises, the spikes and the living logs, the lost parents and the old home were all swept out of his mind. A mate and good hunting—what more could the heart desire?

He pattered forward. She heard him and glanced up, one paw raised; then jumped round to face him. For a moment they regarded one another.

Then Ood advanced confidently into his new kingdom.

THE LONG KNIVES

A Five-Part Story

Part Two

by Hugh Pendexter

Author of "Old Misery," "Red Autumn," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

IN JUNE of 1793 I was returning from Canada, where in the rôle of a deserter from the American Army I had learned much of value to General "Mad Anthony" Wayne concerning British dealings with the Indians. Reaching Virginia, I crossed to the forks of the Ohio by way of the "Bloody Road." As I strode along the forest path, checkered by light and shade from the overhanging forest trees, I recollected the tragic history of that trail. There the red death had skulked upon the footsteps of settlers, and there the armies of Burgoyne and St. Clair had been annihilated by arrow and tomahawk. I prayed that Wayne's army would not meet a similar fate in the coming campaign.

At this time Mad Anthony Wayne was at Cincinnati. To join him I stopped at Pittsburg and

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"The Long Knives," copyright, 1923, by Hugh Pendexter.

took the boat down the Ohio. On the boat with me were a number of Yankee immigrants, among them an odd combination of innocence, genius and bravery named Hate-Evil Durgin. His peculiarities repelled his fellow-travelers and attracted me; we drifted into acquaintance. I told him my name—Peter Watson; my business—spy for Mad Anthony; and my mission—to rejoin the Army and to learn something on the way of a white renegade named Quain, one of a group of whites, including the Girtys and Black Dorman, who were red men at heart.

"Hate" Durgin refused to be cowed by the prospect of meeting these men.

"I won't turn tail to anything short of the ——," he said. "And that ain't bragging neither. The Durgins don't brag."

I looked at him calculatingly. He might be scatter-brained and a dreamer, I decided, but he was too stubborn of soul to give ground before anything that walked on legs.

So at Marietta, Ohio, when I left the boat and continued my way by canoe, I was not displeased that Durgin should have decided to leave the immigrants and to throw in his lot with me. He seemed to think that in the Army he might have leisure to work out some of the inventions he had in mind. We paddled down the river together.

Some thirteen miles down, Durgin was exhausted and insisted on landing. I complied, for I needed sleep. We climbed the hill by an ancient path which led us at length to a solitary cabin. The occupant proved to be a powerful man with a white beard, at first suspicious but finally willing to let us stay for the night.

As we talked together before the roaring fire, which he strangely insisted on keeping up despite the Summer weather, I asked him Quain's whereabouts.

"I may have heard the name, but I don't remember it," he pondered.

And then in answer to our questions he said that the huge fire was for his rheumatism's sake. When he stepped into the back room, however, I thrust a poker into the embers and raked out four buttons and some fragments of smoldering cloth. Our host had been burning garments. Then we heard men coming up the path.

"We must clear out," I whispered.

"Through the back room," Durgin agreed. "That feller must 'a' left the house that way."

As we lifted the buffalo-robe curtain and went in we discovered that a man had been murdered. His naked body lay in the bunk, and the bloody knife was stuck in the wall.

In horror we ran out toward the river. We heard the bearded man behind us calling to the other men. They hailed him by name. He was Quain!

Durgin halted pursuit for an instant by hurling an ax at the leader, but soon they were after us. We gained our canoe barely in time and flashed down the river ahead of them.

Some miles down we found an ally in Old Podge, a veteran hunter of the region, who forced us at the muzzle of his rifle to take him on board. At first I did not welcome him, but later when he had helped Durgin and me to repulse Quain's party I realized that he was of great assistance to us, although he was obsessed with the idea that White Tom, a Delaware whose son he had killed, was on his trail. Quain bothered us no more on the journey. I hoped that one of our bullets had put him out of the world. Still farther down the river the Night Walker, the leader of Wayne's Chickasaw scouts, joined us.

With little more trouble we came to Cincinnati. There Durgin, after a fight with Ogden, a sergeant who made sport of his Yankee peculiarities, joined Wayne's Army. As a result of the fight General Wayne gave orders that no more men be allowed outside of camp without passes.

I reported to the general and told him what I had learned of British and Indian plans. Wayne agreed with me that Alexander McKee, the British Indian agent, was the stimulator of all the trouble between Indians and whites. When my report was over General Wayne thanked me. Then he drummed his fingers softly on the table and asked—

"You would volunteer to go back if it were considered a military necessity?"

I thought of the dangers I had just been through. I shrank from the nervous strain of another Winter among the English and remembered the ignominious fate of a spy. But I answered—

"I am ready at any time, sir."

My heart was heavy as I passed from the hut and walked to the outskirts of the camp to be alone while I thought it over.

CHAPTER III

WE SEEK BLACK DORMAN

AT THE grand parade at eight o'clock next morning General Wayne's verbal order of the day before was read at the head of each company. Fifty lashes for the sentinel who passed a man or non-commissioned officer not possessing a written pass signed by the officer of the day; and twenty lashes for the man who ran the lines or used a forged pass.

Old Podge and I had joined Captain Lewis' company. After the parade we were told off in eight platoons and formed in two columns to be drilled by the field officer of the day for sudden action, whether the attack came in front, on the flank or in the rear. I was amazed to observe the progress made since I last took part in the maneuvers around Pittsburg. There we were, always in two lines, to protect the stores and baggage.

Next we were drilled in the maneuvers of the hollow square, all the movements being executed with great celerity and in high spirits, all of us yelling like demons—the general's orders—and moving in open order with two paces between the files. Two hours of this before we were released.

An excellent example of how discipline was enforced were four posts with a man tied to each. Old Podge, who had paused to watch the punishment, informed me that the quartet had been sentenced to a hundred lashes each and were to be four days in paying the score. There was a half-minute wait between strokes. The fellows wielding the cats had been similarly punished and were now compelled to whip their mates. One of them had his eyebrows and hair shaved off.

As we watched the distressing yet necessary scene there came a ruffling of drums and a poor fellow wearing a rope around his neck was drummed out of camp for sleeping on his post—second offense—contrary to the sixth article of the thirteenth section of the rules and articles of war. There was another, guilty of a minor offense, who was wearing his coat wrong side out and denied his whisky ration for ten days. Such punishments as these invariably followed a spree in town. I began to believe General Wayne was right when he said—

"If not for the baneful effects of liquor there would scarcely be a punishment known in this army."

The liquor evil was great. It had played a large part in the repulse of Harmar's army and in the terrible punishment inflicted on St. Clair's men. And now even Wayne's strongest orders could not stop the occasional smuggling in of whisky in bladders and canteens. There may be those in latter days who, not knowing the incorrigible temperament of some of our soldiers, may think the general was too harsh a disciplinarian.

No fallacy could be more absurd. Several times he remitted a death sentence when the full penalty should have been exacted. I do not recall an instance of his disturbing the sentence when the man's guilt was clearly established and the punishment was a whipping. And I verily believe the fear of the wire cats deterred more malcontents than did the risk of being shot or hanged.

General James Wilkinson, who with a hundred and fifty men had dared to march to St. Clair's battlefield and bury the dead, was appointed to command Fort Jefferson and the intermediate posts of Hamilton and St. Clair. In the same order General Posey was appointed commander of the troops at Hobson's Choice. Shortly after the order had been posted and while General Posey with his aide was inspecting the camp an incident occurred that evidenced the spirit of our officers and illustrated Wayne's attention to details.

A raw-boned Kentuckian, exercising his powerful voice in song, with a deep ring of admirers was choking one end of the company street. Perhaps he was homesick for his cabin across the river, or it might have been the only song he knew—his offering was the lugubrious ballad called "St. Clair's Defeat." He had progressed some distance through the dismal recital of that evil day, for when Podge and I came up the one-sided battle was nearly ended. In a voice that seemed to carry as far as the hoarse growl of thunder through a crotch of the mountains he sang, or roared:

"We had not been long broken when General Butler found
Himself so badly wounded, was forced to quit the ground.
'My God!' says he. 'What shall we do? We're wounded, every man;
So charge them, valiant heroes, and beat them if you can.'

"He leaned his back against a tree and there resigned his breath
And like a valiant soldier sunk in the arms of Death.
When blessed angels did await his spirit to convey——"

The circle split and General Posey, flushed of face, confronted the singer and fiercely demanded—

"What ——'s yowling is this I hear? What do you mean by disturbing this camp by such noises?"

"I was allowing to sing a song for the boys," timidly explained the big Kentuckian.

"Singing? A song! Bah! Where did you get the notion you can sing? Who told you that was a song? The next man heard reciting any poetry telling about the Army being whipped will visit the post for fifty lashes. Now, you with the bull's voice, you open your trap wide and show these men how you'll yell when you get a crack at the Indians. And don't spare your voice either."

The Kentuckian threw back his head and emitted a most hideous yell, one that would have done great credit to the most ferocious of Little Turtle's or Blue Jacket's warriors. Men came running up who had not been attracted by the singing.

"—— it, sir! Is that the best you can

do?" demanded General Posey as the fellow paused to catch his breath.

The man filled his lungs and made another essay, and it did seem as if his howling could be heard at Fort Hamilton, some twenty-five miles away. I saw General Wayne, accompanied by several officers, stride angrily toward the small mob. When he caught a glimpse of Posey he turned on his heel and swiftly walked away. The Kentuckian paused again; General Posey sternly told him:

"That's the only music we want to hear from you. The next time you are at maneuvers I shall be listening for your voice. Be sure I hear it."

The general passed on, and the gathering dispersed. There were no more vociferous recitals of past tragedies in that camp. Old Podge drifted away, and I continued my wanderings in search of Hate-Evil Durgin. I found him solemnly cleaning a company street of refuse and bones by means of a drag fashioned out of green boughs. There were other men engaged in a similar fatigue duty in other streets, only they made hard work of it, carrying the clutter in their arms to the trenches. Where such made innumerable trips Durgin made but one. He finished his stent long before the others. When he was released I asked him how he came to be thus employed.

"They don't understand me down here," he bitterly complained. "I was a fool not to have stopped at Marietty. That danged lumpus of an armorer got mad 'cause I visited his cabin and took a gun apart. I was trying to fix it so's it would shoot without a flint. Fetched me up before a boy officer, and every time I tried to speak the critter would hoot me down. Now I'm booked to do this measly work for a week.

"Of course the drag makes it easier. T'other fellers carry 'em one by one. Got a piece of terbacker for shifting over into the next street and hauling off a load for a feller from Virginia. Then some fuss-and-feathers ordered me back. If they'd keep their paws off and let me alone I'd soon be making a handsome thing by cleaning the whole camp. But they want to punish folks."

It did not require much effort to have him transferred to my rifle company, although Captain Lewis was dubious as to his ever making a rifleman. But he did have a knack of repairing guns, and this was greatly in his favor. He appeared glad to be with me and Podge again until I reminded him of the standing order for the cavalry and light infantry to annihilate any body of riflemen who gave ground before being called in and supported.

On hearing this he stared owlishly at me for a few seconds, then remarked:

"Almost sounds like the riflemen have a harder stent than the others. They must be out a tolerable distance ahead for the cavalry to pepper 'em if they start to fall back. I don't quarrel with the order, but I do think we riflemen oughter have more pay if we run the biggest risk."

At the noon hour much excitement was caused by the convoy-men coming in from Fort Jefferson and reporting another soldier atrociously murdered within a few miles of Fort St. Clair, about fifty miles from Cincinnati. Malignant glances were cast at the Chickasaw and Choctaw scouts who were lounging about the camp. Our red allies were extremely nervous although remaining imperturbable of countenance. The Night Walker came to me soon after the convoy arrived and said:

"The Long Knives we call brothers have a bad heart against us. They say some of my people are killing the white men. They say that the white men meet us as brothers when they see the Black Snake's color in our hair and that we strike them down. Unless the man who is killing the Long Knives is found the Chickasaws and Choctaws will not leave this camp until they cross the river and go home."

"You think a white man, turned red, is doing it?"

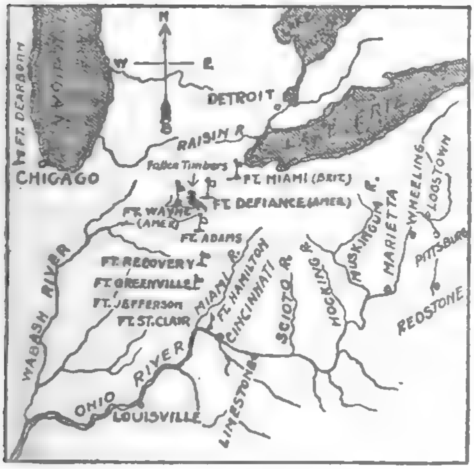
"There are no Indians from the Maumee where the Long Knives are being killed. When Little Turtle or Blue Jacket send men down here they will strike the Long Knives hard and try to kill all of them. Before my people came here to watch the woods for the Black Snake small bands from the Maumee killed close to this village. Now they keep away until they come in a big war-party.

"The Black Snake's red friends will not go into the woods until the white man is caught and killed," he continued. "Some of the Long Knives are saying they will shoot us if they see us in the woods. The hair-cloth given us by the Snake will not save us."

And he touched the yellow ribbon in his hair.

It was a piece of the old trouble the border had had in all its wars; the willingness of some angry soldiers to slay an Indian although he was acting as scout or dispatch bearer. When Fort Pitt was besieged in Pontiac's War the Indian runners bringing dispatches from Detroit to Pitt were shot before they could gain the fort, and their path from Pitt east over the Forbes road was equally dangerous. The insignia of their friendship and occupation had helped them but little in Sixty-three, and human nature had changed none during the last thirty years.

Even as I stood and talked with him I could hear low-voiced threats from those passing us. I knew the whole camp was buzzing with resentment. Nor could I blame the Chickasaw man for refusing to leave the camp until it was proved that none of his followers were guilty of the murders. While I was pondering over what I should say to him Captain De Butts came along. I claimed his attention and briefly explained the situation.



"Unless something is done mighty soon we won't have a red scout left," I said in conclusion.

"It's a —— bad mess," he readily agreed. "The general won't be liking it a bit. Of course the remedy is to catch the chap who's doing the killing. Will they go out and catch this white man, if white he be?"

I shook my head and replied:

"They believe they'll be shot down before making five miles. The men are in a nasty frame of mind. They believe they're safe only as long as they keep together and stick to the camp."

"But you must have something to propose," he urged.

"Have me detailed to look for the fellow. I shall want one man to help me. Old Podge would be my choice."

"A mighty good plan—the only one so far as I can see. Orders will have to come through General Posey as troop commander. I'll see his aide at once. I'll be surprized if you and Podge are not on the road in a hurry."

INSIDE of thirty minutes Captain Lewis was ordering me and Podge to start north immediately in an endeavor to track and destroy the monster who was committing the isolated murders. In parting from me he said warningly:

"So far as I can learn all the killings are alike in this respect—the victim makes no fight. He is killed with ax or knife. His gun, usually found by his side, is always loaded. I'm convinced he is openly approached by some one he accepts as a friend and is struck down before he can sense his danger."

"None of them are shot?"

"No shooting in the cases reported. It's the ax and knife that make the men believe the Indians are doing it. This last man was killed in an opening. He was found where he fell. It would have been impossible for an Indian to take him by surprize."

"An Indian would never leave a good gun," I remarked.

He agreed, and I left him with the conviction in my mind that the Night Walker was right and that a white man was the killer. My spirits were high when I went in search of Old Podge. Already the routine of the camp was beginning to depress me. For nearly a year I had lived on the edge of discovery, and the tameness of drill and maneuvers did not appeal to me. Old Podge was in a black mood. Before I could speak he was saying to me:

"'Course you've heard about White Tom, the Delaware, hanging around the road between here and Fort Jefferson in hopes of jumping me?"

"I don't believe the Delaware is nearer than the mouth of the Auglaize," I replied.

"All I've heard is that you and I are to start at once and find the man who's been killing our soldiers. He's no more White Tom than I am. He's a white renegade. And we must watch out that some fellow doesn't meet us in the woods and make a camp with us and kill us while we sleep."

His old eyes sparkled as I talked, and he was lively enough for the venture, although White Tom would have been far safer game to hunt. He was for starting on the instant, but there were spies on the Ohio and, for aught we knew, in Wayne's army. Men did desert and make the Indian villages on the Maumee or pass through to Canada; and there will always be some worthless creatures in every army. Our exit from the camp was openly made, yet in a manner that precluded a suspicion as to our errand.

This activity of the road-builders was no new thing, for Wayne was a master road-builder and was now training his choppers for the arduous work to come, when he would fool the red spies as to the route the army was to follow. Already he had started roads in various directions; and it was characteristic of his thoroughness to prepare for events months ahead by creating a road-building machine such as no border army ever possessed.

The axmen made an excellent cover until we were well clear of the camp. Then we slipped away from them.

After passing Ludlow's station, six miles up Mill Creek Valley, we moved parallel to the convoy road, the brush allowing us to keep concealed. This was St. Clair's route, which both white and red man commonly called "The Bloody Road." That day we made the neighborhood of Fort Hamilton but did not visit it. We crossed the Miami and pitched our camp a few miles north of the fort after following an Indian trail along a low ridge to avoid the wet lands. Where we halted was a fine open wood, excellent for cover, but not so thick as to embarrass flight.

Old Podge was in an excellent humor and repeatedly mumbled the hope that White Tom would meet him "like a man and have him out," whereas we both knew that the Delaware father when he sought us would come only as the red man comes. And we were hunting a more subtle foe.

"What next?" asked Old Podge as we made a small fire and cooked some deer-meat. "Why not drop back to Hamilton for a little visit and a ration of rum? The choppers will be there, and we'd have rare company."

"No visiting; no rum," I said. "We're decoys. We're inviting a white Indian to attack us. We build a fire on the ridge to attract his attention. When he comes he will come as a friend. He does not shoot from the bush, but will use his ax when his victim has accepted him as an honest man."

My companion made a wry face and muttered:

"Don't fancy that so much. He might change his working plan when he sees there's two of us. He might take a shot at us."

But a shot from the darkness was a risk of our peculiar occupation. If one dwelt on that phase of our hazard his skin would prickle and his back feel cold. It would be useless to seek the murderer in the hope of running him down. He must come to us. With our two lives I was backing my belief that he was a white man and working alone. The Night Walker had convinced me of that in his first talk.

In following the ridge we had found no signs of Indians. Of course this was only negative evidence, for the hard-beaten path would leave very few traces a white man could discern. Equally of course it was possible that the Miamis—called "The Walkers" because of their preference for foot-travel to that by canoe—might be close by in some of the many old paths and remain undetected unless we stumbled into an ambush. But I did not fear this. We were too far south of their villages to meet with any except a large body, and such a band would strike at big game such as the four hundred choppers instead of betraying its presence by attacking two scouts. That night we took turns in standing watch and replenishing the fire, the one off duty sleeping at some distance.

In the morning, after eating, we moved north eight or ten miles, keeping within a mile or so of the Fort St. Clair road but not venturing into it. The woods seemed to be empty even of animal life, although the undergrowth of hazel confined our range of vision almost to the borders of the narrow path. We did not fancy such blind traveling, for practically every rod of the way furnished an excellent spot for an ambush.

"We know there ain't no Injuns in these parts," Old Podge, who was taking the lead, softly reminded me.

"We know it beyond all doubt," I cheerfully replied.

After a few moments of silence he shot back over his shoulder:

"Still there might be—within three feet of us. Lawd! What a place for White Tom to lay for me in!"

And his head rolled from side to side, and although I could not see his face I knew his eyes were wide and staring as the old fear assailed him.

"Even if he were in this part of the country he couldn't know you would be following this path. We didn't know ourselves until we struck into it this morning."

"He could know. There was that cussed smoke you was bound to make, and the light of the fire. All he had to do was to stand off and watch us set off and then dog us."

His tone was almost vindictive, as if somehow I were to blame because the path led us from the open timber into this ranker growth with its thick ground-litter.

"Don't be a fool," I growled. "There's no human being nearer than the St. Clair road."

I had scarcely said this before he came to a dead halt and bent far forward.

"Smoke!" he whispered. "And it's near here."

He wet a finger in his mouth and held it up to detect the direction of the heavy air, then hoarsely said:

"Don't come from the road. What breeze there is is from the northeast."

Instead of depressing me the thin taint of smoke filled me with the hope that we were about to discover the hidden camping-spot of the mysterious assassin. Gliding by Podge, I took the lead and pressed ahead rapidly. The growth shifted to clean woods with only a sprinkling of tall ferns for a ground cover; ahead, like the waters of a lake showing through boughs of a forest, was the blue sky. Those who have passed much of their time under the gloomy canopy of the virgin forests of the West can appreciate how welcome is that glimpse of blue, whether of sky or water, announcing a return of the sun.

We quickly came to the edge of the timber and found ourselves staring at a natural clearing, in the middle of which stood a log cabin. Old Podge mumbled—

"Queer place for a settler to make his home when all the Injun belts have a black line of beads through the Ohio to warn white men to keep south of the river."

It was unusual, unless the settler be a British Indian-trader under the protection of Alexander McKee and equipped with road-belts by the Maumee tribes. One of our most common sayings in Ninety-three was—

"It's death to plant corn north of the Ohio."

"Looks as if smoke was coming from the window and door as well as from the chimney," I murmured; for there did appear to be thin wisps of smoke curling from the top of both openings.

Old Podge squatted on his heels, nursed his long rifle and shook his head.

"Looks 'tarnal queer," he mumbled. " 'Tain't on fire. Don't look like there'd been a wring. Can't see any dead folks out in front. Cabin is a old one too."

"No garden truck planted. Looks as if it had been deserted for a long time," I added. "Must have been a trading-house in the old days. Probably the French built it."

The house was a trap until we could explain the smoke. Neither of us thought for a moment of taking a direct course and learning the cause of the fire by openly approaching the dark doorway. Old Podge slowly rose and grunted:

"Take the west side and I'll take t'other. We'll meet behind it opposite this spot."

I NODDED. He slouched away to cover his half of the circle by keeping inside the growth east of the cabin. I kept back under cover from any spying eyes in the cabin and concentrated my attention on the forest mold, seeking the trail of him who had made the fire. No signs rewarded me until I was in line with the west end of the cabin.

There a fresh trail cut across my path and led to the opening. It was wet land, and the trail was well defined. Two men had passed, both wearing stout shoes. Even had they worn moccasins I should have known they were white men, for at times they walked side by side. One of them was a large, heavy man; the footprints he left suggested carelessness. In following the trail to the opening, I could see easily where he had swung alongside of his companion, but never took the lead.

It was evident also that the tracks were made early during the preceding evening; for while following no established path they had avoided trees and cleared prostrate trunks. That they had not been left since early morning light was indicated by filmy webs formed over them in places. From behind a tree I paused and studied the cabin. There were no signs of life.

Moving back into the timber, I continued on my way, now searching for signs of an outgoing trail. I found none. Old Podge was waiting for me behind the cabin. I briefly told him what I had found. In turn he grimly reported:

"I found a trail quitting the clearing. Making east."

"Then that's settled. They stopped there last night, built a big smudge to keep out mosquitoes and have passed on."

"One did," he whispered. "One of 'em is still in there. Trail I seen was that of one man. White. Trail made some time this morning since sun-up. Wonder what that other feller is doing in there alone!"

For the first time a horrible significance attached itself to the two sets of tracks. My startled gaze put the question to him. He slowly nodded his gray head, twisted his white beard to a point and murmured—

"A trap, sure's you're born!"

I did not want to go near the cabin.

"We must take a look," I said.

Nor did he relish the business, but he nodded and made for the clearing. We halted long enough to scan the edge of the encircling forest; then he ran swiftly to the low building. Podge was the first at the small opening at the back of the cabin and thrust in his head. Before one could count five he was yanking his head back and gasping:

"My ——! That's turrible!"

I pushed him aside and peered in. A man, stripped, lay on the earthen floor. He was dead and had been scalped. On one side the skin was black. Directing Podge to remain outside and on guard, I ran around the corner and entered. My examination was brief. When I rejoined Podge he whispered:

"Some of White Tom's work, ain't it?"

"No Indian did it."

"Must have. There's the hole dug in the floor where the fire was made so's they could roast him. That's a Injun trick."

"The man who used that trick is worse than any Indian. White man's work made to look like an Indian's. The dead man was a soldier. His clothes are in a corner. His cap has the green binding of the Fourth Sub-Legion. There's an empty whisky jug in the corner. He must have been coming from, or going to, Fort Jefferson with a convoy. Got acquainted with a white man on the road who appeared to be very friendly. He was told he could have plenty to drink if he'd step aside from the road and visit his new friend's cabin. He was killed with an ax while he was drunk. He was dead before the fire was built. Our trail leads east, after the murderer's tracks."

"The ——!" groaned Old Podge. "If we catch him we'll roast him on both sides!"

He led me to the outgoing trail. I recognized it as belonging to the man who had led the way to the cabin. We forgot about dinner and followed the signs through a stretch of wet ground. We lost them on a ridge in a thick growth of ash. Until the light failed us we cast about, even descending to the east side of the ridge and skirting its base in the hope of picking up the trail in the wet ground. While we were disappointed by this search we at least had satisfied ourselves the murderer had not quit the neighborhood of the road.

We returned to the west flank of the ridge and perched a turkey; this time we were very careful in making our small fire so that it would not be seen. Although neither of us believed that the white killer suspected our presence we divided the night into watches. After we had eaten an early breakfast Old Podge very sensibly remarked:

"We was two fools to waste time on t'other side of this ridge. We might 'a' known that —— hound bags his game along the Bloody Road. He's swung back there by this time and is prob'ly scouting for another soldier who'll take any risk to git a drink outside of rations."

"His victims have no idea of danger," I rejoined. "The soldiers are blaming our red scouts. Along comes a trapper, who says his cabin is near. He gets in thick with a man hankering for a drink. Tells him to sneak away from the camp as there's not enough drink for all. We'll make in close to the road."

We quit the ridge and worked our way to the west, searching closely for signs of the returning trail. We had no success. We camped that night within two miles of the road and made no fire. In the morning I climbed a tree and gazed over the forest crown and into occasional openings in search of a smoke. Several thin columns in the northwest rewarded my efforts. These were too openly made and too close to Fort St. Clair to be the work of Indians.

Podge and I decided that these were the breakfast fires of the road-builders or of a convoy guard on the way to Jefferson. If the former they must have stopped sometime at Hamilton. Convoys heavily escorted were always going and coming along the road, different companies in turn furnishing the guard for the sake of the experience. The men liked the work, because it broke up the monotony of camp life, although it could be extremely dangerous.

I descended and reported my discovery to my friend, who promptly declared:

"If a wagon-guard is up there that —— will be hanging about to trap another poor fool. If it's the choppers I figger he'll keep clear as they stick well together."

He suggested that we push north a few miles, keeping near the road, and search again for signs. His counsel was good, and we worked along most painstakingly, hoping to come on the tracks made by stout shoes. Luck did not befriend us, however.

By noon, when I climbed a tree, the smokes had vanished, and we knew the men had passed on, north or south. Disgusted by our failure, we changed our plans, struck west, gained the road and set about preparing a belated dinner. I shot a deer and set about broiling some of the meat while Podge went west of the road in search of a spring.

For half a dozen miles above Fort Hamilton the land is unusually good, but there is a scarcity of drinkable water. Only one good spring was marked between Hamilton and Fort St. Clair, and that was fourteen miles out from the lower fort. Old Podge had great faith in a forked branch of willow possessing powers to locate hidden springs. In vain I had endeavored to show him the uselessness of his dividing-rod in that it never could tell the difference between good and bad water. Of the latter we could always find plenty.

I was inclined to suspect that my companion was pursuing his quest in preference to cooking the dinner, for he was frank to express his dislike for squaw-work. I had not passed beyond the good-natured point in my surmises when my attention was attracted by a figure limping down the road. On beholding me the man waved his hand and hobbled forward more rapidly. He was using a musket for a crutch, sinking the muzzle into the ground and fouling it at every step. I idly wondered what his punishment would be for losing his bayonet.

As he drew nearer I observed that his cap was bound with red and decorated with bedraggled red plumes and white hair, the colors of the Second Sub-Legion. One of his shoes was cut away at the ankle to make room for a bandage.

"Convoy scout?" he eagerly asked as he came up to the fire.

His voice was rather faint, and as he slipped a blanket-roll from his back and let it drop on the ground he displayed much weariness.

I nodded and asked—

"Hurt your foot and had to drop out?"

"Turned my ankle. Some of us was drunk last night and had a friendly wring. Beecham, —— him, tripped me and well-nigh twisted my leg off. Time I sobered off 'nough to fix myself up they was all gone. Never such —— luck! Left me behind, prob'ly thinking I was in one of the wagons. All them empty wagons going back to Cincinnati and me made to walk! I just can't make it if I don't git a hoss to ride. And if I don't overtake the wagons I'll be called before a court and git a punishment."

"If you don't make it mighty sharp you'll be a dead soldier," I told him.

He looked startled.

"Can't scare me," he insisted. "No Injuns down here just now. Whole army of tree-choppers went by when we was a dozen miles out from Jefferson."

Yet he swept his gaze over the woods crowding close to both sides of the road.

"Perhaps not and perhaps yes. But I was thinking of a man who works alone, a white man, who's been killing off foolish soldiers almost within gun-shot of Hamilton."

"A white man who kills!" he whispered. "Lawd! But we've been hearing some rare stories about our men being killed. Got so none the men want to stand sentinel duty alone. Had double guards out the minute we quit Jefferson. Two men missing on the up-trip just after we'd quit St. Clair. Put down as deserters."

"Probably both dead," I said. "A man who'll get drunk up here ought to expect to be killed. They say this killer is a white man, a renegade. Makes friends with foolish soldiers—then kills."

"A white man," he muttered.

"Always working alone," I added.

He glanced at me furtively as if suddenly suspicious; then his gaze darted to his useless musket. With an attempt at carelessness he asked—

"Scouting behind or ahead of your convoy?"

I was secretly amused at the fear I had planted in his mind.

"Oh, just scouting along to see the road's clear for the next convoy that comes up," I answered as I put some of the hot meat on a sheet of bark and placed it before him.

"You must be hungry," I added. "Pitch in and eat."

He seated himself and had some difficulty in arranging his injured leg. He kept his gun close to his side, although little good it would do him did he need to use it. I pretended to be busy with my own dinner and from the tail of my eye caught him studying me. His fear that I was such a man as I had described the killer to be would have pleased Old Podge immensely. I was a white man and I was alone. He reached for the meat with his left hand and kept his right resting on his leg close to the gun. As he ate I remarked—

"You're not as hungry as you looked."

"I'm hungry, but I ain't starving," he mumbled. "And I'd ruther have a long drink of water than all the meat ever cooked. Ain't had a drink of water for hours, and the sun is cruel hot."

"And after being drunk you're cruel dry," I added.

He grinned in disgust and licked his lips.

"Burning up with —— fires," he confessed. "I'd call 'most any sort of liquor good, but what we had last night was mortal bad. Mebbe you've got a snort in a horn with you."

"Not a drop," I dashed his hopes by replying.

CARELESS steps crackled the dead ground-litter across the road, and with a snarl the fellow snatched up his musket. I thrust forward my long rifle, knocked the gun aside and commanded:

"Drop that gun, you fool! Want to blow your head off by having it burst along of a barrelful of mud? What you hear is a friend of mine."

He lowered the gun slowly, still perturbed, and muttered—

"I don't go for to hurt any friend of yours."

"You never will with that musket," I laughed. "I would rather stand in front of it than at your side when you fire it."

"You didn't say you had some one with you—I didn't know. 'Fraid it was a stray Injun," he mumbled.

Old Podge emerged from the timber and halted on beholding the two of us. After he crossed the road I explained the soldier's plight and proceeded to broil more meat.

"Find any water?" I asked.

He shook his head gloomily.

"She worked all right. Nearly twisted out of my hands. But every time she p'inted to water I could see we'd have to dig quite a bit to fetch it. We ain't got time for that."

"What be you, mister? A witch-doctor?" timidly asked the soldier.

"Something like that. What be you called?"

"Ben Kezer. Second Sub-Legion. First battalion. Cap'n Dick Greaton's company. If you folks are going down to Hamilton I'd love to keep along with you."

"So'd a mud-turtle love to outrun a wolf, but he can't," said Podge.

"We're not up here to play nurse to drunken soldiers," I told him. "Our work keeps us moving fast. Follow the road, and it won't be long before you make Hamilton. Perhaps you can find a horse at the fort or catch a ride in a wagon. But first you'd better clean that gun."

"Got to use it for a crutch."

Old Podge called him a "lummoxy fool" for not thinking to drive a plug in the barrel before sticking it into the ground. My old trade in the Army as armorer might have stood the fellow in good stead had the weapon only needed to be unbreeched and cleaned; but when I took it from him I found the lock had been hopelessly damaged.

"You made a pretty mess of it," I said in great disgust.

"Must 'a' busted it when I was drunk," he surmised. "After my leg was twisted I remember trying to fetch some one a crack."

"If you hit him you killed him," I assured;

for the blow had been strong enough to do mortal damage.

"Must 'a' taken a lick at that —— Beecham," he angrily muttered. "If I did I hope I bashed his thick head in. Here's me, Ben Kezer, left out here in this death-trap of a road with a twisted ankle and no gun. Might's well lay down and die."

Old Podge fell to on the meat and growled:

"Foller your nose down the road. You won't starve before making Hamilton. Nothing much to hurt you on the way neither. If Gineral Wayne only had enough critters like you he'd be carrying a rare fight to the tribes."

Crawling to his feet, Kezer sullenly retorted: "Thanks for the hunk of meat. But I don't stick to no open road to be 'bushed by Injuns or that white killer your friend's been talking about till I'm all over with cold shivers. I may have busted my gun, but I ain't lost my wits. When I find a path that tags along close to the woods I'm going to take to it and keep under cover."

Old Podge indulged in a snaggy grin and blandly informed him:

"Sonny, there's eighteen different ways of gitting killed up hereabouts, and all of them are onpleasant. But being a free 'Merican citizen you've got a right to git killed any fool way you hanker to. But before you start out you wait a bit, and I'll make another try for water. I'm thinking a bellyful of cool water will do you more good then a new musket. I'll hunt for a surface spring 'stead of using that water-rod."

Ordinarily I would have objected to any delay, but as there was no sense in our wandering aimlessly through the woods I told Podge to make his search a short one and reconciled myself to waiting. Kezer remained standing, favoring his injured foot, and watched Old Podge disappear in the timber aross the road. Then he complained:

"That friend of yours is too plain-spoken. No call to make out I'm a natural-born."

"I wouldn't find fault with a man who was willing to find drinking-water for me," I rebuked him.

"Prob'ly didn't ought to. But I won't be beholden to him. Six or ten miles—and I'll have to go mighty slow— No, I won't wait for him to find water. Prob'ly won't find any. He's good as said that willer contraption is all fool business. Used to know an old witch-doctor near Redstone Old Fort who'd find water with his eyes shut. Used to go after it at night when you couldn't see nothing. I'm thinking, mister, I'll be moving along. It's a hard trip, and I must fetch the fort before dark."

"You're your own boss till you get back to camp. You won't die of thirst. And my friend may not find a spring. They're mighty scarce around here. You'll make the fort all right."

My thoughts were wandering even while I was encouraging him. He stooped twice to pick up his blanket and each time recovered his balance with a muttered imprecation before I sensed his difficulty of standing on one foot and reaching for an object on the ground.

"Hi! I'll get it for you," I offered.

I leaned forward and grasped the blanket-roll. Some instinct caused me to glance up. I saw the heavy, sullen face grimacing with the lust of murder; and I saw the right hand about to bring an ax down on my foolish head. Then a rifle cracked, and the murderer was across my back but making no movement.

I THREW the dead body aside and stared wildly about to discover my deliverer. Old Podge trotted from cover and crossed the road, his leathery face crinkled into a wide grin of triumph which his beard could not conceal.

"Fetched him plumb center! Fetched him right through his murdering head!" he exulted as he came to a halt and stared down at the lifeless figure.

"You happened to see him draw his ax," I muttered.

"Good land of liberty, Peter Watson! But you oughter be a fort soldier and never be let out of the stockade after dark."

"He was going to kill me," I spluttered, glaring at the assassin and dully observing the two red wounds that marked the path of the rifle bullet.

"Just what he figgered on doing," cried Podge; and he kneeled and untied the blanket-roll. "He limped down the road a purpose to do it. He's the Black Dorman you've been so keen to fetch up with. You've done nothing but tell me how he works his games, and then he hobbles along and pulls wool all over your eyes."

Deeply humiliated and horribly startled at my narrow escape, I humbly replied:

"You forget more each second than I'll ever know. Think of me not being suspicious of every white man walking alone up here! I wasn't even suspicious before he gave an account of himself! I swallowed his story whole. But what was the first thing to make you suspicious of him?"

Old Podge paused in his work on the blanket-roll and confessed:

"Mebbe I'd been took in like you was if I hadn't hit a trail in the timber some distance up the road and on t'other side. I followed the signs through the wet ground to the road. White man wearing shoes. Looked like the outgoing trail back in that clearing. It entered the road at the first bend above here. It was made by a man walking free and easy. Not till after it struck into the road was there the holes made by the muzzle of the gun."

"Then you knew who made the trail before you came back here to say you had found no water?"

"I knew he wa'n't what he pretended to be. His talk didn't sound good. If he'd busted his gun by lambasting another soldier over the head he'd been arrested and tied up to wait for a court-martial on a murder charge. I figger he killed a soldier with the poor ——'s own gun. To prove him up I hid across the road and covered him. I was wondering how he'd git close enough to use knife or ax. That trick about the blanket was derned clever. He never made a move to draw his ax from under his coat till you ducked your head toward the blanket. Then he was quicker'n a weasel."

He threw open the blanket. We found there a paint-bag such as the Indians carry and a gruesome trophy that must have come from the cabin in the clearing.

Old Podge read my thoughts and said:

"That poor cuss in the cabin had his clothes in a corner, you said. So he must 'a' snagged another one belonging to the Second. Drank with him and got friendly, l'arned his name and the name of his cap'n."

"Look here," he added. "We've got to leave some signs. You're smarter at writing than I be. Take a burnt stick and in big letters print his name so's any one passing by will know he's follered his last trail."

Only in that one particular could I excel Old Podge on the trip. I secured a smooth piece of bark and carefully printed on it:

BLACK DORMAN WAS KILLED ON THIS SPOT BY OLD PODGE, JUNE 23, 1793. DORMAN WAS ABOUT TO MURDER PETER WATSON, RIFLEMAN, WHEN SLAIN.

I was for burying the remains; but with a *faugh!* of disgust Old Podge declared he would never turn grave-digger for wolf or skunk. And as there was a certainty of the wood-scavengers quickly removing all offensive traces of the tragedy I trailed my rifle and started with my preserver down the Bloody Road, still marveling to find myself alive and thanking God I had escaped such an ignominious fate.

To be killed was the logical chance one took who would travel the Bloody Road. To be killed in a fight with at least some chance of striking back was about all we of the border could ask for when in the Indian country; and in our blundering way we only prayed for a quick death when it had to come. But to have been tricked and murdered by that monster sprawling beside the road behind us would have been a humiliation, I believe, that even the grave could not efface. So I felt mighty friendly toward Old Podge and was thankful he had aimed his long rifle at me above the Big Hockhocking and had forced me to take him aboard.

Thus do trails cut across our trails, bringing great good or great evil. The paths cut in from right and left, overtake us from behind or come to meet us—some with white wampum, some with war strings.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW FARING

WE BELIEVED we had earned a bit of a holiday, and on reaching Fort Hamilton we remained for the night. The garrison and officers were immensely pleased when we told them of Dorman's death, and Old Podge was warmed with liquor to his heart's content.

The country surrounding this post on the east side of the Big Miami is most pleasing, and even a simple man could foresee a pouring-in of settlers once the question of white supremacy was established. As a matter of fact a few movers were beginning to settle along both sides of the road, although the fear was general that Wayne's army would meet the fate of St. Clair's ill-conditioned troops.

I talked with a young man from Maryland who had brought his bride to the hostile country. He and his wife, a young woman of much determination, understood the danger they would be in did Wayne meet defeat up north. But they had planned for that contingency. They said they would have a parcel of meat ready and would keep their ears "to the ground." On the appearance of the first soldier-fugitive they would race to the Ohio and cross into Kentucky. They had no horse but were in prime health, and the woman boasted that she could outrun her husband. I had no doubt she would take the lead if it came to flight and that he would hold back with his rifle.

While Podge was being treated to numerous drams I wandered around the fort and found a melancholy interest in identifying the southern section as being built by St. Clair in September, 1791. Few who worked in its erection came back from the battle unwounded, and the bones of many were buried by Wilkinson, who a year after the defeat added the northern section. The officers' quarters, the messroom and the magazine were still retained in the older section, the artificers' shop being in the addition.

The few fields planted to Indian corn and grains showed the richness of the land, and the hay crop promised to be unusually abundant. What cattle I saw were sleek and fat. I pictured homeseekers taking up the country once it was known a man could plant and harvest north of the Ohio without having his hair smoked.

I poured much cold water over Podge's head next morning before we started for Hobson's Choice. It began raining heavily, and we covered the twenty-five miles at a slow pace, the rain continuing until we were in sight of the camp. My companion deserted me to find food while I was making my report to Captain Lewis. When I had finished my recital of the dead soldier in the clearing and the manner of Dorman's passing out the captain praised us.

"You have a done a mighty big piece of work, Watson. I shall report to headquarters at once. The sooner it becomes public property the quicker the men will stop scowling at our Chickasaws, and the sooner will our red scouts take to the woods again."

"You will remember, captain, it is Old Podge who deserves all the credit. If not for him I would have been murdered like the other," I reminded him. "Durgin, the New Englander, would have done better than I did."

"Old Podge shall have credit," Lewis assured me. "As for that man Durgin——"

He paused and frowned, smiled wryly, resumed frowning and continued:

"That man Durgin! He will surely come in for some severe punishment, I fear. He's in disgrace now. Cut a man in the leg with a knife."

I gaped in amazement; for the Massachusetts man was not one to brawl even when in liquor. Captain Lewis hastened to amend his statement. "The wound was inflicted unintentionally. Yet it makes him unpopular with the men. He would have gone before a court-martial had not General Wayne become interested in the case. He witnessed the beginning of the experiment and on learning of the unfortunate conclusion held himself partly responsible for allowing the experiment to continue."

"But what did Durgin do?" I cried.

"Oh, he invented some sort of a throwing-stick that he claimed would hurl a knife farther than any man can cast a spear. The general is much interested in any new military weapon and is especially partial to cold steel. Durgin could throw it all right, but he hadn't learned to control its flight. His defense is that the knife didn't balance right. Anyway it swerved sideways and stuck a poor —— of the Third in the calf. Fortunately the knife was clean, and the wound will soon heal. But it's only by chance it didn't split his throat."

I found something to eat and set forth to find Durgin. In a manner I felt responsible for him; then again he had played a man's part in Quain's cabin. Rightly placed, he was a very valuable man; but I began to fear his place was not in the Army. I found him busily engaged with a clasp knife and a piece of soft wood. Around him—at a respectful distance—were soldiers. They were watching him, making forceful comments on his knife-throwing and speculating as to the nature of his next invention.

"Probably got something now that'll swoop down a chimbly in the night and knock your brains out," loudly remarked a soldier of the First.

"Not your brains, neighbor. Sleep in peace," retorted Durgin without looking up from his whittling.

Several guffawed at this, and the soldier was tempted to force a quarrel. But he thought better of it and subsided.

"He's making a new-fangled sort of a kite that'll chase Injuns and smother 'em to death," jeered one of the light horse.

"No, sir! It's something to scare 'em to death," corrected another.

I entered the circle, walked over to Durgin and dropped down beside him. He smiled grimly and asked—

"How'd you make out?"

"Got him. That is, Old Podge did."

"Do tell! That's good hearing. Wish I could 'a' completed my self-shooting arrer for you to have taken on the trip. It'll shoot a man who walks into a tightly drawn cord hitched knee-high between two trees. Never could figger out how to make the arrer shoot at the point where the cord is hit. But I'll get it sometime."

"That's not what you're working on now?"

"Lawd, no!"

And he held up a long dart whittled from the soft wood and skilfully carved until it was extremely thin. It was flat on top and tapered from two inches in width down to a point. And like the paper dart he had made on the Marietta-bound boat the keel sloped downward from the point to a depth of more than an inch.

"I like to whittle and fool around with a notion and see how it'll work out," he explained. "It goes something like this."

He picked up a long ash stick, shaved down until it would bend like a well-made bow. A stout cord was fastened to one end. Cutting a notch in the keel of his dart, he hooked it into the free end of the cord. Then, seizing cord and keel between his muscular fingers while his left hand held the ask stick upright, he pulled smartly and released his grip. The ash straightened and snapped the dart high into the air. It was a vast improvement on the hand-propeled paper dart, for it mounted very high and streaked away to the river and was traveling like a war-arrow at short range as it disappeared from our sight.

"Gawdfrey mighty! What sort of a thing is that?" bawled one of the spectators.

"By this time it's falling on the Kentucky shore and sticking through some one's head," cried another.

I remarked that it seemed to be a success, but my friend shook his head and explained:

"Can't be called that till I get it rigged so's to make it circle round and come back to me if it don't hit the mark. Probably have to make it a trifle one-sided to make it do that. Of course it might be used as a fire-arrer just as it is. It would want to be lots bigger so's we could load the tip with a few pounds of powder. Flames couldn't fire the powder while it was sky-hooting through the air, but when it struck the ground there'd be some rare banging."

I was amused by his talk and secretly admired his ingenuity. Then I found myself giving more heed to a man standing outside the circle. His face was familiar, and yet I could not place him. This fault of memory irritated me, for I prided myself on never forgetting a name or a face. I walked over and accosted him.

"Haven't we met somewhere before?" I said.

THE STARED at me as if striving to recall my features; then he shook his head and answered:

"Wish we had, as I'm new down here. Don't know nobody in camp. Don't remember you. My name's Hodgecomb. Came in yesterday to join the Army. Been living at Limestone since early Spring. Folks back there said I was a fool to go to be a soldier."

"They are fools who said it. My name's Watson. You remind me of some one I've known. I'm in Captain Lewis' rifle company. You're in the Fourth Sub."

The green and white in his cap told me that much.

"Cap'n Butler's company," he said.

Then with an appraising glance at my new hunting-shirt and long rifle he added:

"Wish I was with the riflemen. More used to a rifle. Don't like all these colors on my hat. Some of 'em have red. Until the leaves change them red-edged hats will show up in the woods like a fire."

"No danger," I assured him, still trying to recall whom he reminded me of. "When we come to march we'll have so many scouts flung out that no Indian can get within a mile of the Army."

He repeated his desire to be assigned to a rifle company, and as he seemed to know the woods and to be at home with a rifle I volunteered to speak to my captain. As we parted Hate Durgin joined me. Durgin glanced at Hodgecomb and remarked:

"Makes me think of somebody. He's back to us, so it must be the way he walks."

"I felt the same way. So he must resemble some one both you and I know. That limits the possibilities to the people on the boat and the few we spoke with in Marietta."

"The feller who sold you the dugout," he hazarded.

I shook my head, and he shook his head. Yet I fancied there was something about the Marietta man that did remind me of Hodgecomb.

The sobriety of the camp was very noticeable. There was a decided falling-off in punishments now the men were refused town-leave, and the commander was right in his assertion that Cincinnati rum was responsible for nearly all the breaches of discipline. Desertions, however, continued, although with nothing like the frequency that disturbed our leader at the Pittsburgh and Legionville camps. The death penalty stopped the bulk of this reprehensible practise.

Durgin also informed me that during my absence the Night Walker, speaking for all the red scouts, had announced the intention of Chickasaws and Choctaws to leave the army. They could leave any time, and there was none to stop them. When red allies grow weary of the white man's affairs they disappear overnight.

But there was no gainsaying that the man of the Panther clan and his men had cause to be displeased. Three of his Chickasaws who had wandered out a few miles came running into camp shortly after my return, saying that they had been fired upon from ambush. There was no doubt in our minds as to the assailants—some of our own men. Implacable Indian-haters were scattered through all the border settlements and were to be found in any armed force. These would gladly kill a friendly Indian. Fifty dollars reward for proof necessary to convict such an offender before a general court did not end the stealthy assaults. On the second day after my return a Choctaw was murdered six miles up Mill Creek.

It was this crime that quite decided the Night Walker to take his people south. Further to complicate the situation the soldiers began accusing the Indian scouts of attempting reprisals. Old Podge and I considered this talk as a sort of justification for the Choctaw's dastardly murder until a soldier was brought in from Fort Hamilton mortally wounded by a musket ball. Before he died he babbled something about a "yellow ribbon." This was enough for the camp to assume that he had been approached by a Chickasaw or a Choctaw and had been taken by surprize because the Indian wore the colors of a friendly scout.

The killing of Dorman thus failed to bring about relief from these terrible assassinations. Old Podge became very uneasy and gloomily informed me that the soldier's slayer was none other than White Tom, the Delaware. It was curious to observe how tenacious he could be on that one subject. He had seen the hand of White Tom when we started out to find and exterminate Black Dorman. Now he was seeing him again in the death of the Hamilton soldier. I tried my best to convince him of his error; but this time he knew he was right.

The Night Walker came to me and said he dared not leave the camp, even to cross into Kentucky, for fear of being pursued and slain. As to the last tragedy he insisted that a Delaware, Shawnee, Wyandot, or Miami was prowling along the road and with a yellow ribbon in his hair was posing as one of Wayne's scouts. Being accepted in this friendly rôle, he could imitate the venomous trickery of Black Dorman and strike unexpectedly.

There was so much sense in his talk that I carried it to Captain Lewis, who in turn was deeply impressed and who brought it to the attention of headquarters. The situation was very serious. The men were casting savage glances at the red men, and the latter would not budge from camp for fear of being shot. Unless matters were speedily bettered our red allies would desert in a body; and, believing themselves to be the injured party, they might refuse to remain neutral. We had red trouble enough without a southern uprising to distract the country.

Due to Captain Lewis' recommendation I was directed to report to the post commander. General Posey was thoroughly human, and when he wished to discuss matters with a private he encouraged the latter to talk freely. He praised me for putting an end to Dorman and although I made plain what he already knew, that Old Podge was entitled to the credit, he persisted:

"He did his duty like a good soldier. But you were leader of the scout and were the one to propose it. My idea of a remedy is for you and one of the Indians, the Night Walker preferred, to fare north and look for the Indian wearing a yellow ribbon. Bring him in alive if possible; or kill him. You and the Chickasaw will be hostages for each other. The men will be slow to shoot him so long as you are with him, a guarantee for his good behavior; our native scouts will resist any temptation to meddle with your scalp so long as you're escorted by their leader."

I agreed to make the trip and set forth to find the Night Walker and explain the business to him. For an Indian he was quick to accept my proposal, and so it was settled. To quiet the camp the word was passed that the two of us were going into the wilderness to prove that our allies were guiltless of the stealthy killings. The tension lessened at once, but numerous small wagers were laid as to which one of us would outwit the other; for suspicion would not entirely down. I later learned that the odds were against my returning alive.

Even Captain Lewis was worried. He called me into his hut and asked me if I felt perfectly free to go with the Chickasaw.

"As free and safe as if I were traveling with you, captain," I told him. "Our Indians are all right until they are convinced the soldiers are determined to harm them. They are very uneasy. If the Chickasaw and I fail to clear up the trouble there will be no Indian scouts with the army when we march north. Some Indian from the Maumee is wearing the ribbon and is killing under its protection."

"The men are in a bad mood," he sighed. "And not to be wondered at. There are so many of them who have lost folks. When do you think you should start?"

"At the first chance when we can leave without the camp knowing it. Today would be impossible, as the men are talking about nothing else and are keeping a sharp eye on us. There are some desperate fellows in this camp; and it will never do for the Walker to be shot down a few miles out and the Indians be led to believe I killed him."

"It's true there are men here who would kill him in a second if they could do it secretly. So blind is hate! But it's worse to believe there are men wearing the uniform who would deliberately do such a thing simple to embarrass the army. Several have deserted and are now among the Indians or in Canada. If only all of them would leave we'd be better off. General Wayne is counting on our Indian scouts. I'm frank to tell you he doesn't like this distemper of mind among the men.

"I'll give you a pass so you can slip through the lines at any time," he continued. "Go as soon as you can. You needn't report before going. I'll know when you don't answer the roll."

THE Chickasaw and I agreed as to the manner of our departure, which must be made at night. While we were having our talk in the Indian camp an ensign joined us and announced that the man Hodgecomb had deserted and that Indian trailers were needed to run him down. None of the Indians would move from their camp, although the ten dollars reward for the return of any deserter was keenly desired by each one of them.

"Tell the young white man to tell his white chief that the Chickasaw and Choctaw men will not go into the woods until the Long Knives stop listening to what evil birds are telling them," grunted the Night Walker.

I put this in plain English to the ensign, who hastened back to report to his superiors. However, the reward was earned by the soldiers before sundown. When picked up, Hodgecomb was a few miles from the camp and moving north over the Bloody Road. On a stolen horse he rode into eighteen dragoons under Captain Tarleton Fleming, who were returning from convoy-escort duty from Jefferson. An infantryman, galloping a horse north, demanded an inquiry; and thus it was that Hodgecomb was captured by those who knew nothing of his desertion.

Hodgecomb was brought before a general court next morning. Being a raw recruit and possibly influenced by homesickness, he might have won clemency if it had not been for the direction of his flight. Unfortunately for him he had made north instead of south, and this placed him in great extremity. However, he did escape the death penalty but suffered what was as bad. His head and eyebrows were shaved and a "D" was branded on his forehead. Eyebrows and hair would grow again, but never could he lose the livid badge of his infamy. It was a sickening and yet necessary spectacle for the troops to witness.

When the executioner sentenced to act as such in place of the drums and fifes because of some violation of the rules and articles of war—had finished with razor and hot iron I saw Hodgecomb as they led him back to the hut which was to serve as his jail until he should be drummed out of the Army. I was standing in my doorway; and as he passed, his face convulsed with fear and rage, I again sensed that some time, I had known the fellow. His eyes met mine and seemed to be filled with deadly malice. Then he was locked in the hut, and Ogden, the demoted sergeant, was posted to guard against his escape. Strangely enough the prisoner's sidelong glance and the malignant expression of his eyes almost aroused the desired recollection.

I entered my hut and placed a candle on the window shelf. I lighted it; then decided it was not yet dark enough for a light and blew it out. Instantly I remembered. I wrote a name on a piece of paper and hastened to Captain Lewis' hut to explain what I believed I had discovered. But as there is a vast difference between killing a man in hot blood and in sentencing him to be hanged I wished all doubts to be eliminated and for further proof begged of him:

"Have the New Englander, Durgin, stand outside the jail window while the man on guard orders the prisoner to light a candle and place it in the window and then orders him to blow it out. If it doesn't quicken Durgin's recollections, then show him this name and hear what he says. I'm satisfied with my identification, but I can't pronounce it to be positive unless Durgin confirms it without any prompting aside from the lighting and extinguishing of the candle."

Captain Lewis was very keen to make the experiment. He left me to find Durgin and lead him unsuspecting to the jail. Durgin cared not where he walked so long as a friendly ear was hearing his latest theories concerning a new style of bayonet he was perfecting in his mind. We sauntered down to the jail and found Captain Lewis and Campbell Smith, General Posey's aide, talking with the guard.

As we halted—and I took care that in facing me Durgin should have clear view of the small window—Lewis drew Ogden to one side and gave him his orders. Ogden, anxious for once to please an officer, took the candle furnished by the captain, lighted a dry fagot, passed both into the hut and told the prisoner:

"You just light that candle and keep it lighted so's I can watch you through the winder. Put the candle in the winder."

"The wind will blow it out faster'n I can light it," growled Hodgecomb.

"Never you mind about the wind even if there ain't any. It'll keep you busy till I'm relieved."

With an oath the prisoner set fire to the wick, tossed the fagot into the empty fireplace, advanced to the window and placed the candle on the sill. The guard's unusual request had caught Durgin's attention; he had ceased his talking to watch the cabin idly. He saw the prisoner at the window, striving to make out the four of us watching from the gathering darkness. The glare of the candle caused his eyes to blink and fail of their work.

"I see you folks out there, whoever you are," he hoarsely cried. "If this is some game to give you a good chance to murder me you've got your chance, —— you!"

"Blow out the candle if you think that stuff," ordered the guard.

Still suspicious but not relishing the illumination, the prisoner promptly extinguished the light. And he barely had done this before Hate-Evil Durgin's voice excitedly exclaimed:

"He's that bloody —— of a Quain, who was called Hatton, who lived up the river! He killed a man in his log house and burned his clothes! He chased me and Peter Watson down the river! Podge 'n' me thought we shot him! Well, of all doings!"

CAPTAIN LEWIS produced the paper and said:

"It worked. Mr. Smith, you've already seen the name Watson wrote on this paper—the name of Quain, the renegade. You are a witness to Durgin's corroboration, and he will testify he knew nothing of what Watson had discovered."

Quain broke forth into a torrent of terrible abuse as he listened to this explanation of our ruse. Captain Lewis sharply said:

"It's your last night to talk, my man. Talk as you will, for as sure as sunrise a halter will stop your breath in the morning."

Then to Smith he added:

"Under the circumstances it will be impossible for General Posey to permit this man to be drummed out of camp. You'll submit my report to him so the case can be reconsidered. This man is meat for the rope if ever a man was."

With orders to Ogden to redouble his vigilance we turned away—the aide and my captain to make a written report of the matter, Durgin and I to loiter before my hut and smoke a pipe while we gossiped over the unexpected happening. After our minds had cooled off and we got back to normal I sensed a change in Durgin. He was low in the mouth. He had been admonished to cease his inventions and to apply himself to mastering the manual of arms and learning what maneuvers meant.

Whether it was his native independence or merely stubbornness, he bitterly resented the methods used in drilling recruits. It took my mind off the dramatic climax at the jail and rested me to hear him complain. For once I let him run on.

"It's worse'n Marietty," he began. "Up there they could vote me down, but they couldn't chain my mind to a musket. Here's General Wayne a-thinking that bayonets on muskets is going to win this Injun fight and a-saying he'd rather have 'em then rifles. But we know the Revolution showed us the rifle is the weapon for American soldiers."

"Hush! You'll be heard," I cautioned. "It's against some rule and article of war for you to criticize your officers. In this campaign the general plans to dig the Indians from cover with the bayonet, to be followed up with a volley in the back as they run. Indians can't stand cold steel. English soldiers were different. But be careful how you air your opinions."

"There you go again. Can't even open my yawp down here. No musket can rank with the rifle. And here is me, Hate-Evil Durgin, all ready to fix it so you can snake a bayonet from your belt and rig it on a rifle, and I'm told to stop it all or be up before one of their danged courts for a sentence."

"Learn maneuvers, and no one will object to you working out a rifle-bayonet. Your officers believe you spend so much time trying to improve military arms that you neglect drill and the manual."

"That's the point I was coming to," he retorted. "Why in the name of common sense can't an officer tell you where he wants you to go and take it for granted you've got enough brains to go there? Why keep a man for hours going 'right,' then 'left,' then back again, when it would be simple to say, 'Hustle over to that tree and back?' Seems most the time the officer don't know what he does want a body to do."

"You're in a black mood, my friend," I said soothingly. "You'll think better of it tomorrow. Let General Wayne run the army and take the responsibility. You'll have your chance in all good time."

"Yes—after I've been slaughtered and butchered by some cussed Injun just because I ain't allowed to fight my bigness," he bitterly replied. "I was a derned fool to come down here to go soldiering. I could 'a' got rich by staying at Marietty or in Cincinnati, making bayonets for rifles and selling 'em to the Government. And another idee of mine—come to me when all foot officers were ordered not to show up on parade without their spontoons—was laughed at," he added. "I wanted to show how I could rig a barb on the end of them half-pikes so an officer could reach out and hook an Injun instead of just trying to spear him."

We talked further, he still finding fault with the way the army was being drilled, with the officers and with the cruel fate that had led him to be a soldier. I tried to wheedle him into a more wholesome line of thought, but I fear he thoroughly enjoyed picturing himself as being imposed upon and "put down," as he expressed it. When he left me he was still pitying himself. However, if I were inclined to feel sorry for him—a good man seemingly out of place—I soon was to have troubles of my own to occupy my thoughts.

It was a very hot night, and while we were well hutted against the cold of Winter there was scant air stirring in the cabin. According to our custom we braved the mosquitoes and kept the door open for the sake of any vagrant breeze. I spread my blankets on the shelf with my head at the small window while the others sharing the hut slept outdoors close to the walls or on the floor with heads close to the open door. The moon, golden-yellow and stuck flat against the steel-blue sky, had climbed high over the forest before I managed to sleep.

It was the sound of a step that aroused me. The ordinary camp sounds, such as the measured pacing of sentinels and the hurrying to quarters of those released from guard-duty, never disturbed me. But this sly footstep popped my eyes open and sent my head through the window. The moonlight was strong, and the figure of a man slowly approaching our hut was clearly defined. He should have been one of the sentinels to be moving about the camp at this hour of the night. I decided that he had run the lines and was endeavoring to gain his hut undiscovered.

Then he happened to step on a sleeper's hand. The man aroused enough to curse violently and lift himself up on one elbow. To my horror the intruder swung his arm, and there came the dull sound of a heavy blow. The soldier dropped back like a log. It was as brutal and unnecessary as it was unexpected, and my wits remained stupid until the fellow started to run. He passed close to the window. He wore no hat, and the moonlight fell full on his face. I was amazed to recognize him as Quain.

With a yell to the men I leaped to the floor and darted through the door. But already some of those outside had been disturbed by the assault on their mate and were struggling to their feet. I was held back for a few moments. Breaking clear of the group and yelling to them to follow me, I discharged my rifle into the air to arouse the camp. Then I began shouting:

"Prisoner escaped! Making for the river! He's killed a man! He hasn't any hat!"

Had Little Turtle's Miamis poured into camp the response could not have been much more thorough. Huts and tents began disgorging men, and there was much confusion until the officers comprehended the cause of the alarm and took hold of the situation. Searching-parties were systematically organzied in an exceedingly brief period, small bands radiating in all directions with a major effort made toward the river. But scour the bank as closely as we could we discovered no signs of Quain.

I returned to camp and found my hutmate suffering from the blow on his head. That he was not worse hurt was doubtless due to the folds of the blanket hooded over his head as a protection against the mosquitoes. Ogden had been put under arrest during my absence, charged with negligence and suspected by some of having connived at the escape.

His story, as related to me by one of the riflemen, was rambling and vague, and suggested the possibility of his having fallen asleep on his post. But had he slept, the door of the jail would have remained fast. The window seemed entirely too small for Quain to pass through.

Ogden claimed to have been struck upon the head while standing with his back to the window. He insisted that he had been knocked unconscious by the blow and knew nothing until the camp was in commotion. There was a slight abrasion on the back of his head; and on the ground outside the window was the fagot with which Quain had lighted the candle. The rifleman added that he had experimented with the window and with some difficulty had managed to squirm through it.

There was much in Ogden's favor on the surface. Personally I felt I was too prejudiced against him to be able to be fair to him. Quain's readiness to kill when his flight was threatened marked him as a most dangerous man to corner. Had any of the searchers come up with him I am positive no chances would have been taken to capture him alive.

IN THE morning I expected to be detailed to hunt for the man. One of the boatmen employed by a quartermaster had seen a soldier making the Kentucky shore several hours before sunrise, but as the boatman was returning from the Falls (Louisville) and knew nothing of the escape, he had suspected nothing serious and had not investigated. His story seemed to settle the direction of Quain's flight.

Boats were sent up and down the river to intercept him if he crossed to the Indian Shore, and a party was sent across to seek his trail on the Kentucky side. I was not included in any of these various details, a fact that pleased while it surprized me. I was falling in for the interminable maneuvers when Captain Lewis called me out and ordered me to report at General Posey's headquarters.

Wondering what new faring was in store for me, I hurried to the general's hut and was at once admitted. General Posey and his aide were alone. With disconcerting abruptness the general asked—

"Can you win north to Detroit over the Bloody Way, Watson?"

"I hope so," I faltered.

"Is that as strong as you can put it?"

I took time to visualize the length of the Maumee. The forty-mile stretch from the mouth of the Auglaize to McKee's trading-post and farm at the foot of the rapids would contain more dangers, I believed, than all the rest of the journey.

"I believe I can make it," I finally replied. "I will travel to St. Clair's battlefield and then strike across to the Glaize. If I can make the mouth of the Maumee I'm convinced I can get passage on one of Matthew Elliott's boats and reach Detroit."

"General Wayne wishes to have a thorough woodsman at Detroit, a man who is from the army and who realizes the importance of the job. That man must remain at Detroit, or across the river on the Canadian side, and be ready to bring us word of the result of our commissioners' council with the tribes. Randolph, Pickering and Lincoln may finish their treating with the Indians at any time; and it is of the utmost importance to the army and country that there be no delay in getting news through to us.

"The War Department has arranged for messengers, but General Wayne will feel more secure if in addition to them he has one of his own scouts fetching the word. The messengers will start east and south once the Indians give their answer. Some may not get through, but of the men coming south one *must* get through to this camp. You are not detailed for this work, you understand."

"I volunteer to go to Detroit and bring back the word," I told him.

And I was justly proud to be offered the opportunity, and at the same time I dreaded the adventure because of the chance of being recognized by some of the Indians along the way.

As if shrewdly surmising the trend of my thought the general kindly said:

"There is no point in your going if you are to be captured. If you believe there is a strong chance of being captured you needn't hesitate to step aside. We can use you to good advantage as a rifleman "

This fired my pride, for a Watson could go where another could, and four of the name had marched with Braddock. Yet the Scotch strain always tempered me to caution; and I told the general:

"When up there before, sir, I wore a beard. This time I will be fresh-shaved. And I prefer to be marked down as a deserter. The savages will accept me as such, I am positive, just as they have accepted other deserters from this army. The only risk I run that I can see is that of being recognized by some man deserting from this camp and arriving on the Maumee before I can make a boat on Erie. Any such who follow me must believe I am a deserter; then their recognition will do me no harm, but support my story."

The general exchanged approving glances with Campbell Smith, then turned to me and said:

"It shall be as you wish. It's necessary you get away at once. When you fail to answer the roll you will be marked down as a deserter and men shall be sent to find you. You will be allowed a decent start. Those who look for you will be in earnest, as none will know the truth except we three and General Wayne and Captain Lewis. Now do you wish to take any one with you?"

I remember the Night Walker's and my plan to hunt for the savage masquerading as one of Wayne's red spies and suggested that I might have a try at that business by taking the Chickasaw along with me at least as far as Fort Jefferson. General Posey readily approved, saying:

"By all means take the Indian if he'll go with you. Take him the whole distance if he will be of any help. If you can shoot the savage wearing our yellow ribbon, well and good; but don't delay your travel north to hunt for him."

A new plan popped into my head—rather an amplification of the first, prompted by the general's insistence on speed. I believed the enemy Indian, posing as one of our scouts, was either traveling back to the Maumee towns or was still lurking along the convoy-road. So I made bold to suggest further:

"Let me have a rifleman known as Old Podge, and another known as Durgin. If the Chickasaw goes along we will be four. We will scout the country rapidly as far as St. Clair's battle-ground, where Podge and Durgin can turn back while the Indian and I go on. The two of them could leave camp ahead of us and wait for us up the road so there would be no question about me being a deserter."

The general's brows wrinkled, and he sighed:

"Ah, that Northerner! Do you dare take him? Already he has been before one court and escaped with a light fatigue. Now the camp waits to see what his next punishment will be. If the officers didn't believe his errors were of the head rather than the heart he would have been snubbed up quickly and punished severely."

I assured him Durgin would be of much assistance as long as we followed, or kept near the Bloody Road; and when I left headquarters I was authorized to make what use of my three friends I saw fit. Hate-Evil Durgin jumped at the opportunity. He even was frank and foolish enough to declare that unless he was relieved from the rigid routine of camp life very soon he would be tempted to consider desertion as a cure. Old Podge was warm to make the trip and again insisted that the mysterious Indian with the yellow ribbon was no other than White Tom.

"It's like his sly way of hanging round a place," he said, speaking as if familiar with the Delaware's habits and tricks. "He's killing every soldier he can on the chance it's me."

It was useless to argue with him when he was in that vein.

The Night Walker was silent for a minute or two after listening to my proposal; then he said—

"The white friend of the Panther man shall have the Night Walker's words after one sleep."

With that he gathered up his blanket and repaired to where the Indian scouts had their brush shelters. Without waiting for the Chickasaw's decision I reported to General Posey through Campbell Smith that I should start on the following night unless receiving orders to the contrary.

Posing as a deserter with a reward of ten or twenty dollars placed on my head, I must fly in earnest, and I needed the darkness to give me a decent start. My next task was to find Old Podge and Durgin and secretly direct them to take to the Bloody Road and scout north as far as the point where Black Dorman died. It was agreed that they should wait for me there for two days and return to camp if I failed to show up.

Ensign Smith arranged it for them to be assigned for immediate scout service; and by the middle of the afternoon they were traveling north. This arrangement eliminated the risk of the four of us being seen traveling together after I had been branded as a deserter. My rôle was extremely disagreeable; yet it might save me from the stake did a genuine deserter reach an Indian village where I was held captive and vouch for my villainy.

While I was busying myself with these preparations Private Ogden was tried at a general court-martial on charges exhibited against him by Captain Henry De Butts. There was no doubt in my mind as to the fellow's guilt, but of evidence there was none. His defense, that he had turned his back to the window and had been struck down and deprived of his senses, was scarcely credible inasmuch as the wound on his head was superficial. The charred fagot, however, was found outside the window, and it was shown that a slim man could wriggle through. They were compelled to discharge him.

He leered at me triumphantly as I was returning from seeing my two friends start on their scout.

"Hard work to make a innocent man look guilty," he told me.

"There won't be any doubt next time," I told him. "What did Quain offer you to let him hit you on the head? And how could you trust him not to brain you in good earnest?"

He stuck his tongue in his cheek most impudently and whined—

"How can you talk like that to a poor soldier who ain't got no friends, and who never done nothing wrong?"

And he hurried off to take part in the maneuvers.

WE HAD commenced the practise of marching and maneuvering by signals; the army was vastly different from the one I had left the year before. Despite the ne'er-do-wells and the vicious the troops were rapidly being whipped into shape until they were as well trained as any of the Revolutionary War troops. General Wayne was rigidly insistent that the army hold itself in readiness to fight at a moment's notice; and each day's hard drill had to be carried out with the same spirit as would be expected if the enemy were attacking in fact. It was difficult to hold the men up to the point where they ceased thinking it was all make-believe; yet it was accomplished.

Never did the "General" sound without the men pouring from their huts with the utmost celerity and in fighting trim. They advanced smartly when a march was played, three taps showing the position of the column. The "long march" would send the troops ahead, the entire body moving as one man. The pace slackened only when a "ruff" was sounded; and only the "retreat" caused a halt. The firing ceased almost instantly when the first of the "General" was played; and I never tired of watching the soldierly manner of response when the "troop" called in the light infantry and the dragoons or when the "long roll" summoned us of the rifle companies. So far as I could judge, the army was fit to meet any number of red men in that Summer of Ninety-three.

But I did not relish dwelling on the problem of holding the men in high spirits should our three commissioners be delayed in carrying out their mission. It was best for the army and the country that the Indians decide for war or peace at once. If we were in for a general war the quicker we struck the safer the long frontier would be.

I have made mention of those in the army who were dissatisfied with the service and received merited punishment. It should be understood that these were few in number compared with the whole and that the great majority of us were honestly striving to do our duty. Among such it was commonly believed that did our commissioners sign a peace with the tribes it would merely be postponing an inevitable conflict.

It had been a common experience on the border for years for a portion of a tribe to send in peace-strings while the remainder of the same tribe skulked about settlements, stealing horses and taking scalps. General Wayne was frequently being warned by Secretary of War Knox against taking the offensive, whereas the sooner we got at the bloody business and had it over with the sooner would the tribes make a lasting peace.

The men searching for Quain were making the most of their holiday and had not yet returned. I feared there would be no word from them before I stole from camp. My mind would have been easier could I know before starting on my long errand that he was either recaptured or dead.

General Wayne was as keenly interested in the maneuvers as if watching them for the first time. It seemed impossible for a gun to miss fire without his knowing it. If the man failed to yell convincingly when making a charge he had them repeat the maneuver. He was here and there and everywhere, complimenting a battalion, sharply critizing the slovenly appearance of an officer, absorbing a hundred and one details as if he possessed many eyes and could be in several places at one and the same time. His immaculate appearance was a constant lesson for all who would be good soldiers. Although open-hearted and kindly by nature he would permit nothing to come between him and his purpose of making the frontier safe.

Once I heard him reply to an officer who had remarked that his men were nearly exhausted:

"——, sir! Let them do their work if they would rest. Do you think I enjoy watching a half-hearted carrying-out of my orders? Or that the settlements do not need a rest from Indian invasions? Send them through that timber again; and this time I want to hear them yelling when they strike the clearing beyond."

And he heard them.

There were some in the army who condemned his untiring efforts to build up an army that would survive the traps of the forest. Such foolish ones could not realize he was safeguarding our lives as well as the settlements, and that only by endless drill and strict discipline could he cause the name of the "Slaughter Pen" to be forgotten, as applying to the Miami and Maumee country.

Perhaps in my heart I too at times resented the long hours spent in charging imaginary enemies through the dark timber, in rasping my throat by yelling and in simulating great zeal in firing blank charges. But if I did have those weak moments I had only to think of how much it would have meant to my father and his three brothers, could they have been schooled by a Wayne, to efface such a silly frame of mind.

As we riflemen were going through the last of our evolutions, turning the left flank of the enemy while the light infantry charged the center with fixed bayonets, I was startled by a bullet whistling between me and Old Podge. It came when the infantry had finished pretending to pitchfork the savages from their hiding-places and were loosing a crashing volley. Podge and I instinctively treed ourselves, each trying to say something to the other. The riflemen emptied their guns, and I stepped from my tree, only to duck back as a second bullet clipped close to my head. Captain Lewis hailed me and said rebukingly:

"The riflemen are not to tree themselves so long as the enemy is being turned, Watson. You're not out on a scout with the odds against you, or covering a retreat. The whole army is supporting you. This army never retreats. Bear that in mind, my man, even in maneuvers."

My face burned, and I could not answer my superior. But I did draw my finger along the bole of the tree where the last bullet had plowed a furrow and set the sap to oozing. He caught my gesture, frowned heavily, and stepped forward and demanded—

"What —— fool play is this?"

"Not fool play, if you please, captain," I answered; "but deadly earnest. It's the second ball that's fanned me within the last few minutes."

"Some idiot mixed balls with blanks!" he fumed.

He shouted for an ensign, but before he could attempt to stop the firing by this slow method the "long roll" silenced the guns and called us in.

Walking beside me, he asked for details. I told him what little I could and referred him to Podge, who had felt the wind of the first ball. He sent a runner ahead so that the light infantry's ammunition might be examined before the men were dismissed. To do this required some time, but with the non-commissioned officers and officers working, the job was thoroughly done. No ball cartridges were found.

After we were dismissed Captain Lewis sent for me and asked if I suspected any one. I replied that I did, for Ogden's company held the ground where the bullet had been fired from, and I knew the fellow held a grudge against me because of my friendship with Durgin.

"The name, sir?" Lewis sharply demanded.

"Captain, please don't require that," I pleaded. "After all it's only a suspicion. The man couldn't prove he didn't any more than I could prove he did. And I haven't a bit of proof."

Lewis had the good sense to drop the matter, and I returned to my hut. An hour later the Night Walker came to the door.

We had the place to ourselves. I asked him in, filled and lighted his pipe, then filled my own. He took a few puffs and then announced—

"The Chickasaw man of the Panther clan is ready to go into the woods."

"It is good. As soon as it is dark his white brother will take a tomahawk and his rifle. One who walks in the night can lead a white man through the night."

"The Night Walker dreamed last night of fresh blood in the red road."

"He dreamed of the blood of the Northern Indian who wears yellow cloth in his hair to trap soldiers. It is good."

This pleased him much, for it was what he desired me to say.

"When the night creeps like a wolf between the cabins the Night Walker will be at the north end of the camp," he told me.

Wagon and pack-horse trains were passing more frequently over the road to Fort Jefferson. Even while the Chickasaw and I were talking a score of dragoons and sixty light infantry marched north as an escort for stores for Hamilton and Jefferson. Under a recent regulation each convoy would act as garrisons for the posts until relieved by the next convoy. And as I was to be marked as a deserter in the morning I must play the part of deserter from the moment I stole from the camp. To keep clear of the escort would trouble me and my red companion but little; but with troops in the road we might find it difficult to pick up Old Podge and Durgin above Hamilton.

With the first darkness I took a path some distance from the road and stole through the scattered growth for two miles. The Night Walker stood beside me before I had time to suspect his presence. I softly told him—

"A cloud crosses the sky and is seen, the wind steals over soft grass and is heard; but it is easier to hear the cloud and see the wind than to hear the Night Walker when he comes through the darkness."

This fanciful way of complimenting him on his woodcraft was very dear to his heart, and I knew that I had pleased him much as he swung in ahead of me.

Another mile, and we were risking the road. It was in good condition and quite level. The stretch of country between Forts Washington and Hamilton was very fair, and I ever loved to traverse it in the daylight. The Chickasaw read the future even as I did, for, as if speaking his thoughts aloud, he muttered—

"Many white people will plant much corn and make many cabins along this road after the Black Snake drives the Northern tribes away."

We stuck to the road until nearly midnight, when the glare from the low-burning fires of the convoy drove us to the woods. We took to the woods on our left and pressed on to get ahead of the convoy before making a dark camp. The men had learned their lessons well, for although we were some distance from the road and were supposing ourselves to be clear of the sentinels we were suddenly halted by a crisp—

"Halt!"

WE BEGAN retreating farther from the road. The sentinel called out again; then his musket banged and sent a heavy ball in our direction. The shot brought men on the run; there was much crashing of heavy feet through the ground litter. We avoided the foot soldiers easily enough, and they were handicapped for fear of shooting each other.

But the occasional soft footfall of a rifleman was an entirely different kind of problem. Once a rifle cracked, and the fellow had the range too fine for comfort. Yet we remained motionless for a minute before slipping away. For an hour we were hard put to escape from the scouts flung out ahead of us. It was not until shortly before sunrise that we halted several miles from the road and dared to camp.

Now my task began in earnest; for those who desert and go to the Indians usually endeavor to present themselves in such a guise as to deter the savages from slaying them on sight and before they can secure a hearing and be accepted as renegades. With a sigh I slipped off my new hunting-shirt and undergarment and with my knife changed my long breeches into hip-leggings and made me a loin-cloth out of my blanket, leaving my thighs bare.

Then I submitted to the Night Walker's artistry. He shaved my head except for a roach of hair that served as a scalp-lock, after the Shawnee fashion. Next he produced his paint-bag and quickly painted my face in a grotesque pattern of varicolored patches. My appearance must have been quite hideous, and yet I knew that even at a short distance the effect was to permit my countenance to blend with the forest background. As I was posing as a renegade and had not yet been washed and adopted by any tribe there was no significance to my markings, and he repeated the patchwork of colors on my chest.

I hid the hunting-shirt, although I had no notion I should ever seek to recover it. As a rifleman I had been issued a tomahawk and scalping-knife; I wore them at my waist. When I picked up my long rifle and motioned for the Chickasaw to lead the way he hesitated and asked:

"Does my brother wear a yellow cloth in his hair? It might stop a Long Knife from shooting him. It might make a Long Knife shoot him, now it is whispered that the Black Snake's red friends are killing his Long Knives."

To wear it or go without it would be dangerous. I decided:

"I will wear no yellow cloth. If we can find and kill the Northern Indian who wears the color of Black Snake's Chickasaw friends the Long Knives will know the whisperings were lies."

He removed the yellow ribbon from his own scalp-lock and remarked:

"It is not good for one to wear the yellow sign and the other be without it. If a Northern Indian sees us he may think we are friends."

He was more astute than I, for I had not realized how incongruous it would be for the ribbon to be worn by one and not by the other. We swung in toward the road, keeping a sharp lookout for the scouts on both flanks of the convoy. Before midday we were within a few miles of Hamilton; and, knowing that the convoy would stop there to leave supplies and rest, we took the road ahead of the train and traveled fast. My mind was on my hazardous journey to the Maumee, but the Chickasaw thought only of the business originally planned between us. He refreshed my memory by saying:

"It is not good to look for a strange red man in this road. He can shoot us from the woods. Let my brother take one side of the road and keep his eyes open for a red man wearing a yellow cloth in his hair."

I swung off into the timber on the right, and he took to cover on the left.

Suddenly I realized that I was very hungry. Did I wait until I found Podge and Durgin there was no knowing when I could stop to cook meat—certainly not near the road. On waking that morning I had eaten some parched corn supplied by the Night Walker, but I ever craved meat and much of it when running free in the forest.

The *gobble-gobble* of a cock-turkey accentuated my appetite. I believe I had heard it for some time, but, it being an ordinary woods sound, had given it no heed. I believe it was this welcome sound that made me remember I had fared scantily. I softly made for it, entered an open grove and drew my ax. The gobbling ceased for a minute or so. Then it resumed, sounding as if very close at hand. And yet I was puzzled to locate it. I halted by a big oak and glanced closely around, but I could see nothing of the big bird and his harem. Yet I could swear it was within twenty feet of me.

Holding my rifle in my left hand and half-raising my ax for a cast, I glided from the tree. The gobbling stopped. A sound, as soft as a padded cat would make in dropping from a bough to a cushion of pine needles, brought me about-face. Within ten feet of me stood an Indian of medium height. He had an arrow drawn to the head; did I make a move I knew it would be through my body. He had a yellow ribbon in his scalp-lock; yet he was neither Chickasaw nor Choctaw. He wore no covering except moccasins and a breech-cloth, and his entire person was elaborately painted after the Miami fashion.

"You are one of Michikinikwa's* warriors," I said. "I have run away from the Long Knives to go to his village."

As he did not shoot I knew he was wavering. He said, speaking softly and with the deliberate slowness peculiar to the Miamis:

"The white man speaks with the tongue of my people. Little Eagle of the Wea tribes can kill him."

"Are there no enemies of the Miamis—Shawnees, Delawares or Wyandots—that Little Eagle can kill? Or must he kill a friend? The piece of cloth in his hair is talked about among the Long Knives. They say he has killed the Black Snake's men, both red and white."

"The hunting has been good," he proudly admitted. "The Long Knives must dream the Snake will be crushed by a red moccasin. Other men from his camp have gone to the Maumee to make friends with the Miamis."

I dropped my ax and rifle and suggested:

"Put down your bow and arrow and let us talk. I am no stranger in the Maumee villages. There is a mat for me to sit on, and corn to eat when it is in the black silk. White men who have lived long in the woods do not like the huts of the Black Snake's camp nor the voices of the drum and fife telling them what they must do. The woods are very large. It is good to sleep in different places and hear no drums."

I stepped clear of my ax and rifle and seated myself. For nearly a minute he stared at me, but by degrees the cord of the bow began to relax, and at last he moved back and squatted on his haunches with his bow and arrow held before him. But the arrow remained against the cord, and it would require but one swift movement to draw it to the head and send it through me. I filled and lighted my pipe and extended it toward him.

"It is not good to live in one hut all the time," I said. "The red of the sugar-tree's leaves in the hunting moon has crept into my blood. I have lived long in the woods. I went back to the white villages on the Ohio and was choked by many huts. I ran away from the Black Snake's army to get out here where there is room to breathe."

I talked to cover the awkwardness of holding the pipe outstretched. Did he refuse it I believed my business was done before it fairly had commenced. He was weighing the situation very carefully. Ignoring the pipe, he said:

"Back of me, hung in a tree, are five hoops. When I go back to Little Turtle's village and show him the Chickasaw, Choctaw and white man's hair I will have a new name."

I knew he was hungering to make his collection an even half-dozen by adding to it my scalp-lock. And yet common sense was telling him it was a poor profit to swap a live deserter for my wiry brush.

"You will have a new name. They may call you Eagle-Who-Strikes. Many young women will want to sweep out your lodge and make you new moccasins."

His eyes glittered at the pleasing pictures my praise created. His left hand reached forward and accepted the pipe. By a mighty effort I conquered the desire to draw a deep breath, and I began idly playing with some last season's acorns. He took a few puffs and found the Army tobacco too strong for his taste; and, having fulfilled his duty to etiquette, he handed back the pipe.

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*Little Turtle's

I leaned forward to take it. Instead I gripped his left wrist and with a violent yank drew him forward, and at the same time lunged toward him. The next second he was frantically stabbing at me with the arrow. I felt the barbed head gouge my shoulder before my free hand could whip out my knife. Then we were at it, gripped in each other's arms, rolling and threshing about over the mast and making as much noise as hogs rooting for their food.

I was conscious of soft footfalls approaching, and I exerted myself to finish the grisly work before he was reinforced. He dropped his arrow and grabbed for his knife. For the fraction of a moment his mind was divided between the purely defensive and a new offensive. And as I rolled to one side to pinion his right arm while still maintaining my grip on his left wrist, I found an opening. Little Eagle's dream of parading his scalps in the Turtle's village was ended. Panting and wet with sweat, I rolled clear of him and got to my feet. I leaped to secure my rifle and meet the newcomer.

"MY WHITE brother has shown the Chickasaw how to hunt and fight," said the heavy voice of the Night Walker.

Then most dolefully—

"It was work the Night Walker should have done."

"It was nip and tuck," I gasped in English.

Then, remembering the dead man's boast, I began searching for the oak he had mentioned and soon found the five hoops each having a smoked scalp drawn over it. None of them were painted inside, the slayer having reserved this important ceremony until he could have more leisure. Handing them to the Night Walker, I said:

"Take them to the Long Knives in the road. Tell them this Miami man is dead. They will see two white scalps and three red."

"Two Chickasaw and one Choctaw," he muttered, still regretting that his had not been the hand to make reprisal.

Then thoughtfully he told me:

"My white brother walks in a very bad path. He must keep both eyes open, or a root will trip him up, or a tree will fall on him, or he will fall and hit his head on a rock."

Which meant that I would be mighty lucky to enter a village on the Maumee and escape the torture, whether it be a village of the Miamis, Delawares or Shawnees. The Chickasaw continued:

"The hair has not been painted red. My brother shall take them with him to prove his heart is with the Northern Indians. They show he has killed Long Knives and three red men. Any men on the Maumee will know one is Choctaw hair and two are Chickasaw. He will carry them at his belt."

And he removed the scalps and rumpled them up to conceal the signs of having been stretched after the Indian fashion.

I knew the self-sacrifice accompanying this offer, and I recognized the wisdom of his advice. But I could not take the poor white scalps into the Maumee villages, nor did it seem just to the Chickasaw to take the scalps of his people. I told him:

"Night Walker, greatest of the Chickasaw nation, I wish I could say these words on belts, so you would always remember them. I wish I had strings of wampum to put beside my talk, so when you are an old man you could pick up the string and say—

" 'The white man was my friend and I was his friend.'

"But neither white nor red scalps will I take to the dogs on the Maumee. Let them be buried here in the woods."

Fully five minutes he stood with folded arms, staring at me fixedly, and only by the rising and falling of his powerful chest could I observe how strongly he was affected. Yet when he spoke his voice was low and composed; and he said:

"Like the song of the bird in the South which has many sweet songs have the white words fallen on red ears. Let it be as my white brother has said; let the earth, that is mother to red man and white, keep the scalps."

We buried them carefully and scattered the mast over them to conceal all signs. Then I spoke of my second duty, and one I did not relish, saying:

"I must go with you nearly to the road. I must hide in the woods until you can find and bring to me an officer of the Long Knives. All this so I can tell that man that a Miami, and not a Choctaw nor a Chickasaw, has been killing the Long Knives."

"Then the white man will know what

you do. He may have a loose tongue. He may talk so evil ears can hear and send a talk to the Maumee ahead of you. Take your gun and ax and start for the road. The Night Walker will be with you very soon. He will make the Long Knives see he speaks with a straight tongue. They shall not see my white friend."

I started off, eager to find Old Podge and Durgin; inside half a mile the Chickasaw man was running at my heels. I turned my head and observed he had found the dead man's blanket and was carrying it by the corners.

"What have you in that?" I asked; and I knew even while I was speaking.

"The head of the Miami man," he replied. "It wears the yellow cloth. The Long Knives will believe the Night Walker when they see it. But they must not see the white man."

The Chickasaw's direct method of exonerating himself and his Chickasaws relieved me of much anxiety. I was loath to abandon my rôle of deserter even to talk in confidence to an officer. News of the army and news of the hostile Indians was constantly passing back and forth; for if we had spies in Detroit and Canada, so did the tribes, urged on by Spanish and British agents, have white spies along the Ohio and close to Wayne. Let the officer be of the highest honor, and yet there would always be the possibility of some of his men spying upon him, of a scout following him and babbling over the bottle what he had seen. Enough were in the secret already.

When we were near the point where Durgin and Podge were to meet us my companion left me and scouted on to the road. He was gone a long time. I was fearing the convoy had passed before he made the road, or had doubted his gruesome evidence and had done him harm or were holding him prisoner, when the bushes parted and he stood before me. But there was another savage behind him, one with wrinkled face and cunning eyes; and I instinctively shifted the position of my rifle.

"Dog my cats!" exclaimed the second figure.

Then with a familiar, cackling laugh he cried exultingly—

"Fooled you good, Watson."

Then I noticed his eyes were blue, and despite his shaven head and paint I recognized him as Old Podge. He was much more elaborately painted than I, and the solitary tuft of hair was painted black. If it had not been for his eyes and voice I would have accepted him as an aged warrior bent on following one more path even if he left his bones in it. With my wits in order I demanded:

"What about Durgin? Where is he?"

The Chickasaw was the first to speak, saying:

"The Night Walker found this one white man. After he saw the bloody head his heart was heavy, and he cut off his hair and asked for paint."

"If he'd dumped White Tom's head on the ground I'd 'a' stayed white," explained Podge. "I'd figgered it was Tom who was making the killings. Fooled again! But when I l'arned 'twas a Miami man then I knew White Tom was prowling round somewhere; and I made up my mind I'd go where he wouldn't be looking for me—right amongst the Indians. With my hair off and the paint on he'll be mighty smart to know me. I'm going to find him and stick a knife through his ribs and then take a long sleep without dreaming he's creeping upon me. You seem to be some finnified up yourself."

"But Durgin? The New England man?" I impatiently reminded him.

"Oh, him? The lanky cuss quit in earnest. Figger he got a bellyful. Ran way just 'fore the convoy come up. Prob'ly at Hamilton by this time."

I shook my head. Durgin hated military restraint and the curbing of his inventive genius too strongly to return to Hobson's Choice until he was forced to. But he was as good as dead if he fared north into the heart of the "Slaughter Pen." I told my friend:

"We must push on and find him. He never went back to Hobson's Choice. It's only a question of hours before he's a dead man."

"He's too —— uppish to suit me," grumbled Old Podge. "Made a breast-shield out of willer and layers of bark and said 'twould stop a bullet. Then he got his dander up when I wouldn't put it on and let him take a shot at me. Got double mad when he put it on and I wouldn't shoot at him."

"So you two quarreled and you let him go off alone, knowing the first Indian he met would knock him in the head?" I sternly accused him.

"Didn't do any more quarreling then he done," was the stubborn defense. "I had 'nough trouble on my mind in thinking about White Tom without being pestered by his cussed chatter. I did go after him to fetch him back. But I quit coaxing when he hinted at me to stay in the road."

And from his belt he fished out his worn fur hat and called my attention to a double perforation.

"Nearly nicked my skull," he explained. "Sp'iled the hat in the bargain. Fetched it along to wear when mosquitoes bother. What we going to do? What you painted up for?"

"I'm going to the Maumee River as a deserter. You go back to the camp."

"Not by a —— sight! No, siree! I'm just proud as you be. If you can quit I can quit. I'm up here to put a stop to White Tom's troubling my sleep. I either go back to sleep sound of nights, or I'm going to take the dogdangdest long sleep any man can ever take."

I had no time to act as his keeper. I turned to the Chickasaw and asked—

"You have left the head?"

"The Long Knives saw it. They hung it to a tree and put talking-marks on a piece of bark and hung that on a tree."

"It is good. The black Snake will be glad such a warrior is with his army."

I thrust out my hand to shake his in farewell. He pushed my hand aside and explained:

"A ghost whispered to the Night Walker to go with his white brother. He may hear the voice whispering for him to go back. He does not know. So long as the voice is still he goes north. He may die on the Maumee. He may go back to his village with many scalps. It is good."

All of which told me he was without fear and would press on against all dangers until he happened to have a dream which he could interpret as a warning for him to turn back. Then his flight to the Ohio would be direct and swift.

And there we were, three of us, filing through the dark forest and feeling our way for twenty-five miles to Fort St. Clair, the small post built by St. Clair in 1791. We avoided this and after a night's rest covered another score of miles to Fort Jefferson. We saw several details of soldiers but were not discovered even by the scouts.

Much of the travel was through swampy lands to avoid being seen, and we suffered considerably for the want of good water. Near Jefferson we shifted our course to the northeast, anxious to penetrate as far as possible toward the Maumee before being discovered. The closer we got to the Indian villages the less risk we ran of being hit in the head by some wandering band of scalp-hunters, who would be loath to turn back from their path for the sake of escorting us to some village.

Our course was planned to avoid the Shawnee town of Piqua* the one on the site of ancient Pickawillanee and not the earlier town of that name on the north side of Mad River where Tecumseh was born. Once we were clear of this village we believed we could gain the head of the Auglaize undetected and follow it down to its junction with the Maumee.

No land could be more desirable for homebuilders than this northwestern country between the Ohio and the lakes. Mountainous in sections, boasting of broad valleys and rich river-bottoms, pleasing plateaus as level as cabin floor, wonderful forests relieved by delightful prairie openings, it did seem as if Nature had exhausted all her amiable patterns here. The only drawback in certain broad sections was the lack of good water. This annoyance would vanish once the settlers came in and dug their wells.

It was easy to play the prophet as we crouched at night around our tiny fires and foresaw the valleys of the Maumee and the Wabash filled with happy homes. And yet there was the red influence over our minds, ever reminding us that it was in this land that the mighty Pontiac planned his confederacy, that here Tecumseh was born; that here ruled Little Turtle of the Miamis whose fathers kindled the first fires at Detroit; that here dwelt the great Shawnee chief Blue Jacket.

Toward this center of the red power we held our way, the Chickasaw being urged on by his dreams and superstitions, Old Podge and I preferring to fall into the power of lions rather than that of the jackals. As the night winds crooned and whispered softly, the Night Walker pricked his ears as if listening to concealed voices.

To me the breeze suggested only those other and harsher winds when the snow blustered and played the bully at the small windows and stout door and I heard the cry of wolves in the gale, while my father heard the screams of the dying and the triumphant yells of those ringing Braddock's death-knell.

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*Site of modern Piqua.

CHAPTER V

WHEN TWO MAKE FOUR

WITHOUT any unusual adventures we avoided Piqua and struck toward the head of St. Mary's River, where James Girty, successful Indian trader, had resided with his Shawnee wife Betsy for some seven years. It was his presence at the Shawnee village that gave it its name of "Girty's Town," although many have assumed it was named after Simon Girty. Had not James, more closely affiliated with Indian life and customs than his brother Simon, abandoned this trading-post when General Harmar began his advance, we should have been apprehensive of venturing near it. But James was permanently located on the Auglaize, and we had small fears of meeting either him or his Shawnee friends.

Traveling north, we made the Auglaize a few miles above the spot where two years later the Shawnee were permitted by the Miamis to make their town of Wapakoneta. At this stage of our journey our numbers were reduced a third by the unexpected withdrawal of the Night Walker. A white man under the circumstances might have been accused of timidity, but none ran ahead of the Chickasaw in courage. His leaving us was due to a dream. The first inkling we had of his purpose was when he abruptly announced to us one morning:

"The medicine voice tells me to leave my white brothers. It does not say the Night Walker shall go back to the Ohio. It does not say he will come to his brothers again. It does not say he will not come to them."

It was a waste of breath to argue against the "voice." I liked the man and thoroughly appreciated his splendid courage; but while you may wean a white man away from his religion there is no separating an Indian from his medicine. So as he made his few preparations for leaving us I simply said:

"The voice has been heard by the brave man of the Panther clan. The voice always speaks what is good. We hope it will send you to us again."

"Last night in a dream it said it was not good for more than four to be together. If one of my brothers is killed the voice may send me back," he replied.

Old Podge squirmed uneasily and glanced over his shoulder.

"The Chickasaw talks blind words. There are only three of us," he objected.

"How can three become four? Surely not by one of the three losing his life," I ventured to add.

"Two will make four, the voice says," he imperturbably replied. "If one dies the voice may send the Night Walker to make four."

I was accustomed to the vagaries of the red mind, and I knew it was a waste of breath to endeavor to dissuade him. Of course I realized that four is the mystery or sacred number among many tribes, especially with the four C's of the south—the Chickasaws, the Cherokees, the Choctaws and the Creeks. I could understand why he should dream of four, figuring as it did so constantly in his thoughts and plans; but it was worse than silliness to talk of two men making four men. I had but one question to ask:

"Did the voice say when there would be four of us?"

He did not appear to have heard me. Without word or glance he secured his blanket and gun and slipped into the woods without any of the white man's external signs of regret, such as shaking hands or indulging in good-bys and good wishes.

After he had vanished in the forest Old Podge stared glumly at me and muttered:

"Sharp and sudden. That's the trouble with an Injun. Can't never tell which way he's going to jump. That's what makes me so all-fired stirred up about White Tom. I can look ahead and make a good guess as to what a white man will do; but an Injun always acts contrary to what you expect.

"What'd he mean about one of us dying, I wonder?" he added. "That would leave one. All darned foolishness! Here's two of us left. 'If one dies,' he says. Now what did that mean? Wonder if he told all he dreamed? Low he didn't. No, sirree! That Injun kept something back. He dreamed I'm going to die. That's the trouble of having dreams. Makes you suffer twice. But how'd his medicine know

I'm going to die? What right has he to dream such stuff?"

"We all must die some time. As you say, his talk is only stuff," I told him.

But the Chickasaw's words had made a deep impression on Old Podge. The man's withdrawal appealed to him as being very ominous. He said nothing more on the subject, but although outwardly calm I knew he was brooding over the mystery of two making four.

SMALL and great councils were being held on the Maumee preliminary to the tribes' representative men meeting our three commissioners. Owing to these activities only small bands of prowling savages were out. We did not fear discovery by these so much as we did by runners passing back and forth from St. Mary's to the Auglaize. We decided to travel by night whenever possible and to save our strength by journeying by water.

As the Maumee tribes preferred land travel it was no simple task to find a hidden canoe. We finally managed the navigation problem by using two dry sections of a fallen tree-trunk. The logs were of about equal length, and our labor consisted of tying them together with grape-vines, after breaking off the dead branches, and of making two poles from saplings. Every time we broke off a branch the sharp snap sounded as loud in our ears as a rifle-shot. On the edge of evening we worked our narrow raft down the bank and into the river. With our poles we felt our way down-stream.

Shut in by the woods, the river was dark, and more than once we grounded at a bend. Since the current was gentle usually we could pole off without making much noise. When we became entangled in the bank growth one or both of us took to the water and remedied the mishap. We could have made better time by following the river-trail, but would have run a greater risk of being discovered.

We worked along until nearly sunrise, the woods forming a solid green wall on each side. We saw no smoke. We landed on the west shore and selected as a hiding-place a pocket under the earth-covered roots of a huge tree, High water had excavated the bank for ten feet beneath it. We removed the grape-vines and left the two logs stranded on the shore some distance apart. There was nothing in the appearance of the stubs of the dead branches to betray us; should an Indian penetrate to the edge of the water he would see only two pieces of driftwood.

From some smoked deer-meat, prepared at a previous camp, and a small store of parched corn we made a meal. We planned to take turns sleeping until darkness again would mask our advance; and I elected to stand the first watch. Old Podge slept soundly. The placid ripple of the river inclined me to sleepiness. I wanted to smoke and did not dare.

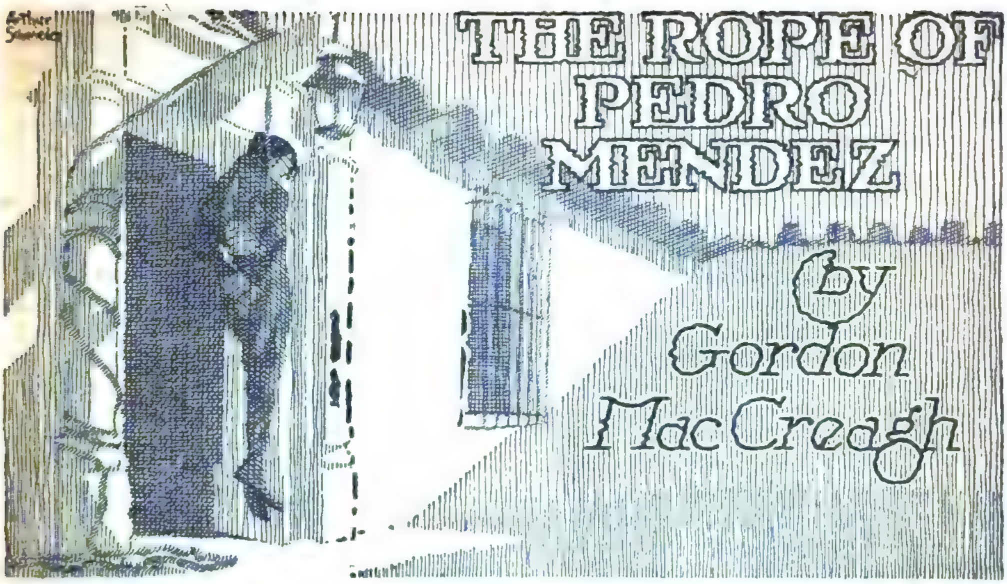
It was dull work crouching there under the roof of the straggling roots, softly warring against mosquitoes and waiting for the dull, hot hours to pass. After the first sixty minutes I was forced to bathe my head and neck to keep awake. I was diverted for a bit by watching the sinuous grace of an otter a short distance up the stream. His fishing ended so abruptly that I rubbed my eyes in wonderment at his disappearance.

Then I was wide awake in all truth and knew why the otter had vanished. There came the sound of soft, thudding moccasins along the trail above our heads, for the path skirted the top of the clayey bank. I leaned forward and aroused Old Podge by shaking his foot. He opened his eyes and sensed the meaning of my warning instantly. Bits of dirt fell on our heads as the network of roots became a bridge. The steady *thump-thump* of the moccasins persisted and told us it was a large band traveling carelessly. Probably from some foray to the south.

We crept to the edge of our hiding-place to hear the better and craned our necks to look up the bank. Hazel and other small growth, interspersed with willows, prevented us from seeing the single file of men passing along the path. Podge yanked me back as some one plunged down the slope. I threw off his hands and renewed my spying.

I was amazed to see a young white woman about to throw herself into the river. Brawny arms of copper shot from the thicket behind her and dragged her, screaming up to the trail.

TO BE CONTINUED



THE ROPE OF PEDRO MENDEZ

by Gordon MacCreagh

Author of "The Crawling Script," "A Good Sword and a Good Horse," etc.

IT WAS a very good rope. Quite the best in all the *Altiplano* of the Lake Titicaca. Pedro had sworn by the most sacred hem of the robe that it should be so through all the tedious while that he was making it. And Pedro was a good Christian.

He was an Aymara Indian of the high Bolivian Plateau, short and stocky, with the tremendous chest development of a people who live thirteen thousand feet up in the air. His simple clothing consisted—in spite of that chill elevation—of a pair of baggy trousers of hand-woven llama wool in the natural color, and the ubiquitous short poncho of the same material dyed a brilliant orange, with a bright green and crimson stripe bordering it. Grass sandals and a wide-brimmed bowl-crowned felt hat. That was all.

When it rained upon him during his long hikes to the market of La Paz city—sixty-five miles, which he did in one day—he just trotted on. When it sleeted—which it did more often than it rained—he just trotted on. When the shrieking snow devils of the high Cordillera whirled so thick that he couldn't see his hand, he just sat down in the middle of the vast barren plain—for no trees or sheltering bushes grow in the *Altiplano*—hugged his knees up to his chin so that the poncho formed a tiny tent, and slept. The only inconvenience it was to him was the loss of time; and time mattered very little.

His skin was a dark, reddish-brown in color, and in texture a sort of permanent goose-flesh. Continual wet and perpetual cold apparently had no effect upon it. His face was broad in all its features. Wider across the cheek-bones than from crown to chin. Eyes correspondingly far apart. Mouth, wide with the characteristic downward twist of the lips. Nose, that peculiar flattened-down aquiline. Pure Inca sculpture, all of it.

But his grandfathers for twelve generations had already forgotten all about that—not even a legend was left—and they had all been good Christians before him. For longer than they could remember they had lived at the Hacienda Guatta Suri, serfs of the soil on the country estate of Don Eduardo Romero, who was a very great Señor because he owned a mile or so of shore front on Lake Titicaca, where, with great labor, a pitiful quantity of beans and microscopic potatoes and other indigenous tubers might be coaxed from the soil which is four thousand feet higher than where Nature gives up in disgust.

Yet many peons—under sufficiently urgent appeal—can furnish a great deal of labor. The *hacienda*, a grandiose old

Spanish building, fallen rather to desuetude, bulked huge and rambling over a couple of hundred adobe huts. So Don Eduardo was rich, as wealth is determined in that barren country.

Pedro was one of the peons, and he was, on the whole, happy and contented in that lowly state of life into which it had pleased God to call him. Happy, that is to say, for a people whose condition of servitude has long since blunted the faculty of happiness.

For only a short while ago Don Eduardo, riding magnificently by, had looked upon him and had asked his *administrador:*

"Who is that man? His face appears familiar and he looks like a powerful lad."

"That?" replied the *administrador*. "Why that, excellency, is Pedro Mendez. *Buen' muchacho y buen' trabajador*, a hard-working lad. His fathers have been in the service of the excellency's fathers for four generations."

So the excellency had said:

"Good. Make him *llama zagal*, herdsman to the llamas."

Thus the faithful retainer of four generations had come into his merited reward. He belonged on the estate; so he never got any pay. But as *zagal* he was allowed to keep a tithe of all that his labors earned. Nor was he beaten by the *administrador* with a plaited raw-hide quirt—as long as his earnings kept up a fair average.

This idyllic existence might have continued indefinitely, but for the contentious doings of those great señors who quarreled and plotted far from Pedro's humble orbit.

For some reason which Pedro could not understand, there came revolution in the land. Pedro in his distant sphere did not even know that there had been a revolution. All he knew was that there came riding one day a very grand señor on a black horse with plenty of gold braid on his uniform, followed by a guard of brown soldiers who grounded arms with the one-two-three snap and precision of Germans, and who swiftly followed alert under-officers to detached posts commanding the *hacienda*, and stood then very stiff and immaculate and splendid.

It was as good as a fiesta; and all the peons left their work furtively—for the *administrador* was nowhere at all in evidence—and came and watched with the sullen, stolid apathy of the Aymara Indian, adding an air, with their brilliant multi-colored ponchos, of gala festivity to the tragedy which was shaping itself so quietly in their midst.

The thing had happened overnight. *Sua Excellencia el Presidente* was in sanctuary in the British consulate. Sundry ministers were in the American consulate; and others were distributed about similar inviolate ground. The revolution had been swift, very nearly bloodless, and quite successful. Don Eduardo in his country home was as completely surprized as had been the rest of the party in power at the time.

To onlookers of other nationalities in the city, there had been a comic-opera element in the whole affair. But to the man with all the gold braid there had been nothing humorous at all. He was one of the most important of the *insurrectos*. If he had failed—well, everybody knows that South American republics waste very little sentiment and no time at all with revolutionaries who fail.

But he had not failed. So he was now one of those whose word went very far in the new administration. Somehow or other it became whispered around that this gorgeous, great señor, who sat his magnificent horse so grimly, was General Fono Henriquez—which in more familiar accents sounds not unlike von Hendricks.

The great man very thoroughly understood the principle of wasting very little sentiment and no time at all. At a grunt from him a smart *lugardiente* saluted crisply and fired an order at an under-officer, who with equal smartness detatched a file of stiff, wooden soldiers and marched them into the house.

And the grim man sat stiffly on his horse, waiting.

The peons milled in the outer circle, half-curious, half-scared, and muttered short Aymara gutturals to each other.

In a few minutes the soldiers came out from the house with Don Eduardo between them, looking very bewildered, but calm with the dignity of many generations of Dons. When he saw the grim man on the horse, bewilderment passed and left only dignity and a certain calm courage.

The grim man's face showed nothing of satisfaction or triumph; only a cold and utterly merciless determination to accomplish the thing in hand with swiftness. His eyes glowered somberly from under the low peak of his gold braided cap.

"Five years it has been, Don Eduardo," he said in a voice without emotion, heavy on the Spanish aspirates but hard as thin ice. "Five years, two months and nineteen days."

Don Eduardo replied nothing. He looked at the circle of his peons, some three hundred of them, surrounding the little troop of soldiers. He reflected that he had treated them well—as well as they had expected anyway. But—they were only peons; and, for all he knew, any or all of them might have been onlookers from neighboring estates. What could they understand or care about the feuds of the great señors?

The soldiers, on the other hand, were the crack Tenth regiment, the *Lobos*, wolves who stood notionless to attention as if they might have been on review in the Kaiser Platz in Berlin.

His eyes turned back to the grim man; and there was no hope in them; but dignity still.

THE grim man nodded slowly. There was no need of speech. Both of them understood very thoroughly, and each knew the other much too well to waste time in fruitless argument. The man whom the swift turn of Fate had placed in power nodded again in cold appreciation of the other's understanding. He turned to his *lugardiente* and pointed his gauntlet—since there were no trees—at the great beam which projected over the faded coat of arms above the doorway of the *hacienda* from which hung a great iron lantern.

"That will be a suitable place," he said. "Let it be done with speed."

The lieutenant saluted stiffly and barked an order to the *sargento*. The latter's alert eyes had already been roving in quest of what he knew would be required. Pedro Mendez stood among the encircling peons, his rope wound about his waist. The sergeant just pointed.

Three of his men ran; and the bewildered peon found himself suddenly hustled between them as they sought for a loose end. When he understood their intent on his precious possession his indignation dared him to a bellow of remonstrance, and a half-hearted resistance.

Without a second wasted in explanation or argument one of the soldiers struck him upon the mouth. Another at the same moment found the rope's end and jerked sharply at it. Pedro's body was twisted round. The other soldiers took hold and helped their comrade. Pedro whirled like a top as the cord unwound, till he was unable to hold his balance any longer, and he fell to the ground and rolled along, over and over, while the soldiers heaved with a merry will and ran off together with the other end of the rope.

The peons were roused out of their apathy to guffaw at the sportive incident. Some of the stiff soldiers, looking out of the corners of their eyes, were unable to resist covert smiles, which they quickly repressed under the stern glare of the *lugardiente*. This tragedy which was about to be enacted was not to be spoiled by any undue levity. Nor was it. Preparations were short and simple. Those men had experience. So before the peons understood very well what was happening and while they still laughed over their comrade's mishap, Don Eduardo, their master, was hanged before his own door.

The grim man sat his great horse like a statue till the last quiver of the body was over. Then through the awed hush his voice cut curt and incisive.

"*Bien hecho*. Let the man fall in and march."

That was all. There was no throwing of caps in the air. No *vivas* for the honor of the new administration. In a very few minutes the last of the little column had disappeared behind a barren, gravel ridge. The only trace of the tragedy that had fallen upon the *hacienda* out of the clear sky was the body of its master, still twisting slowly at the end of the rope.

The peons looked furtively at each other. Muttered interjection and question passed as if some menace still hung over them. Since nothing happened, they began in little groups to approach the gruesome doorway; like wild things; ready to break and run at any unexpected shout; looking over their shoulders at the slope of the gravel ridge.

But nobody came back. The act of punishment or vengeance or whatever it had been, had been swiftly, efficiently accomplished and all was over. They were left to their own devices. With dull incomprehension they looked at the swaying thing and at one another. There was no one to take the initiative. Then a house peon suggested rather diffidently that perhaps they had better cut the thing down.

"*Talla. Asqui gha-the.*" That was a good idea.

Having come to a decision, there was no reluctance about approaching the corpse. Knives were produced. But Pedro Mendez intervened with a scream of rage.

"*Qua gani!*"

What stupidity! That was his rope. His unexcelled *lazo* over which he had spent a full month in the making. What fool spoke of cutting it?

So Pedro shed his poncho, careless of the thin wind on his thick, grainy hide, and climbed up on to the beam and lowered the body to the ground. All of which was easy for him; for, as the good master had noticed, he was a powerful lad. Then he knelt and with his teeth worried the knot loose where it had tightened round the neck. Getting it free at last, he examined the cherished thing carefully for signs of abrasion or strain, grumbling sullenly to himself about the annoyance of the whole affair. Some of his friends helped him examine, and emitted congratulatory noises for that it had suffered no damage. Meanwhile the body lay untended on the ground.

After considerable further indecision they carried it into the house and began to disperse, some to their huts, some to the fields. There was nobody to direct them. In a dull way some of them began to discuss how this event would affect themselves. Would they have to work harder? Or perhaps under another *administrador?* These were the things that mattered.

Then somebody said irrelevantly—

"Like this it kicked, and like this."

And he showed how the wretched victim had writhed. The galvanized jerkings had been quite comical, and they laughed aloud at the graphic description. Somebody else, not to be outdone, showed how Pedro had rolled when they took the rope from him; and they all laughed again.

Colorful events had happened in the drab tenor of their lives. Food to furnish talk and discussion for many weeks to come. So they all fell to telling each other just how it had happened, all over again, acting out their impressions as they had received them, and laughing hugely at the comical figures cut by the actors. In the general mirth—among these people who had so few things to laugh at—the tragedy and its bearing upon their lives was forgotten.

But their lives were affected not at all. The *administrador* came out of his hiding and swung his long quirt with gusto to make up for lost time. Don Jaime, the son of Don Eduardo, came to the *hacienda* and took charge, and matters resumed their uneventful course, except that instead of toiling in the fields—five days for his master and two for himself—he was the *llama zagal* of the whole estate. All that he had to do was build huge corrals capable of holding some thirty or forty llamas apiece and to see that they didn't escape or die; and to collect and dry the droppings from day to day. For this was *takia*, and formed one of the valuable assets of the estate. La Paz being a city tucked away in a deep gash in that high *altiplano* where nothing grows except a sparse, coarse llama grass and a few imported eucalyptus trees, wood costs far too much to burn; so *takia* is the sole fuel of all the kitchens in town.

Quite the pleasantest part of Pedro's job was loading some twenty or thirty llamas with the week's supply of fuel in little bags—which Pedro wove by hand out of llama wool—and trotting them sixty-five miles to market and peddling the fuel all Saturday afternoon at the back doors of the city.

Pedro enjoyed these little jaunts very much, for in the city he met other llama herders as fortunate as himself, and he exchanged with them coca-leaf and gossip and perhaps a paper twist of dye powder; and, if he had had a good day, he often felt that he could afford a drink of *chicha*, the thick, acrid beer made of corn which the old women first chew to start the ferment. Pedro could well afford a drink, or even two, of this good stuff; for his whack out of the week's sales sometimes amounted to as much as four or five bolivianos, nearly a dollar and a quarter.

It was for these pleasing little week-ends that Pedro chiefly needed his rope; more even than as a lasso. Though at any time during the week, whenever it might be necessary to keep a bunch of llamas together outside of the corral, one might have seen the quaint use of it. The foolish beasts were just herded together and the rope formed an encircling fence round the tall stiff necks of all of them.

Saturday afternoon, then, was high *fiesta* for Pedro and a score of his kind who invaded the city of La Paz with little herds of llamas each loaded with its sack of *takia* and each group herded within a *lazo* enclosure.

After the pleasant day spent in the city with jolly companions came the cheerful camp at night, when all the llama herders gathered on the edge of the plain above the town and corralled their beasts with their *lazos* in the middle of the empty *altiplano*, and huddled in the thin rain, each in his individual poncho tent, and ate cold kidney-beans and chewed coca-leaf and grunted to each other till sleep came.

With the first beginning of dawn Pedro would stand up abruptly, whistle shrilly to his llamas, grunt something which meant, "Till next Saturday, good friends," and would commence the long sixty-five-mile trot home, herding his beasts with an unerring sling, even as David herded the flocks of his father.

So Pedro passed another six months in contentment and happiness—and possibly even gratitude. For the good Padre Urquidi had especially pointed out:

"Consider, my son. Any other peon might at any moment be appointed to the position of *llama zagal*. It is right, therefore, that you be duly thankful."

So Pedro, being a devout Christian, was properly thankful and bought scented candles in La Paz market to offer before the statue of *La Sanctissima Virgen* in the little private church of the *hacienda*.

So well-conducted a lad deserved recognition. And so presently another little job was imposed upon Pedro. A position of honor. A labor of love for his spare time.

THE little private church, like all the others in all the isolated *haciendas* of the *altiplano*, was an oblong of four adobe walls, a stout roof thatched with *tortora* reeds cut from the bottom of Lake Titicaca, and a squat belfry in which hung an ancient, mellow-toned Spanish bell. Within, upon the white-washed walls hung ancient Spanish paintings of scriptural subjects. At one end was a stout rail which fenced off the altar and the customary statues of the Holy Family. This was the sanctuary, and inviolate. The rest was bare. No pews. No chairs. Just a well-trodden mud floor covered with split *tortora* matting.

So, since it was harvest time, and there was no other suitable floor in all the settlement of Guatta Suri, the beans and the *okka* and the *quinoa* were collected there and dried and sorted and packed into great woolen sacks and stored in rows along the walls.

All with the most matter-of-fact unconcern—for it was the universal custom—and all with the utmost reverence. To Pedro was assigned the honorable position of keeping the place clean. A sort of sacristan he became, and he took his duty very seriously.

The good lad, *buen' trabajador*, was becoming a person of consequence in his community. The world was a roseate place to dwell in.

Alas that the lowly must be dragged into the embroilments of the great. Once again the peon's idyllic existence was rudely shattered by sudden tragedy. Though this time not quite so unexpected as before.

Pedro himself brought the news from La Paz city that there had been turbulent doings. He was not able to give any very clear account to his fellow peons—who did not care very much about it anyway—but it seemed, from what he could gather, that certain of the great señors, friends of the *Presidente* who had been deposed by the last revolution, had made an abortive attempt to recapture the reins of authority. Guns had been fired, was the talk in the market-place, and a *gringo* who had nothing at all to do with the affair had been killed. But that seemed to be all.

"*Quoi kla ung tha,*" said the peons, which is their invariable non-committal remark when they mean, "To each his own business." But it was a good joke about the *gringo*. There was always something worth listening to in the gossip which Pedro brought from that far away city which many of them had never seen at all.

But almost at Pedro's heels arrived Don Jaime on a hard-ridden mule, looking very perturbed. He called the *administrador* to him and went into the house.

And almost at his heels in turn, round the barren gravel ridge that thrust into the lake, came once again the splendid horse of *el Señor General* trotting easily, with the ominous figure of the grim man swaying stiffly in the saddle. Behind him a small mounted troop.

There was no surprize this time. Don Jaime screamed aloud once from within the house and rushed out and across the slope above the fence, scattering sand and gravel as he fled to the little church, where he darted in at the door.

The grim man without turning his head merely grunted. Riders spurred to cut off a possible retreat behind the building. Without a fractional increase in speed, without flurry or excitement, the grim man turned his horse's head and rode to the church followed by the rest of the little troop. There was something horridly terrifying in the cold deliberation of it all.

At the door, just as if on parade, the troopers waited the word to dismount. They reached the ground with the rhythmic creak and clank of one man. Without a word one in every four held the horses of the other three. The rest entered.

Pedro Mendez, since the affair had now become actively his business, left his llamas standing, corralled with his rope, before the door of the *hacienda* where he had come prepared to render his simple account, and ran to the church. He was afraid, of course, with the Aymara suspicion of all strange señors. But was he not a sacristan of the holy edifice?

Within, the scene was a horrible one. Don Jaime clung groveling to the altar rails and screamed. The grim man stood grimly by, his troopers in the background, waiting for the screaming to stop. From the corner Pedro watched sullenly; disinterested but perturbed, wondering whether this latest brawl of the great señors presaged more work for him in the sacred precincts.

When at last the terrified shrieks, for sheer lack of breath, had subsided to great shuddering sobs, the grim man spoke.

"You have been a particular fool, Don Jaime," he said with judicial impersonality. "Though no more of a fool than the rest of your ill-advised friends. Against you I have no personal enmity. But the insurgent party *must* be wiped out. It is the order of *sua Excellencia, el Presidente.*"

Don Jaime had none of the same stern stuff as his father. He wrapped his arms and legs round the altar rail and fell to horrid, inarticulate screaming again. The grim man lifted his eyebrows in cold disdain and pointed with his chin.

"Take him out," he ordered.

Four troopers clanked forward and laid hands on the unfortunate *insurrecto* who had failed. The wretched man jerked spasmodically as if stabbed by their very touch, shrieked and clung like a sloth, and bit at their hands in the extremity of his terror.

Pedro started forward from his dim corner. This was unthinkable profanation. He dared to address the great señor without first standing mutely to request leave. His many journeys to the city had taught him a halting Spanish.

"But señor, excellency, this is holy sanctuary."

The excellency looked with faint amusement at the queer interruption. Then he turned to his men with irritation.

"Stop that man's screeching and take him out," he ordered testily.

Two more troopers went to help. The thing became a hideous pandemonium of slobbering, slavering shrieks and panted oaths. Pedro's simple soul was shocked. Everything that the good *padre* had taught him revolted against the awful profanation. He found courage to lay a hand on the commanding officer's sleeve.

"But excellency, this is sacrilege. Surely the señor would not dare to——"

The excellency felled him with a savage blow on the mouth.

"Corpse of a pig! Lay your filthy monkey's paw on me——"

He barked a harsh laugh at the half-stunned and wholly cowed defender of the faith:

"Sanctuary and sacrilege are for thick-headed peons. We outgrew all that stuff long ago."

Some of the more hardened troopers laughed with their leader. Then, finally breaking the last despairing tenacious hold of the doomed man's arms and legs, they carried him out, slobbering, slavering and jerking; for all the world like huge gray ants with a worm.

The grim man followed, once again cold and inexorable and calm. The heaving, kicking knot of men came to the *hacienda.* There was, of course, only one possible place. The grim man pointed silently to the great beam above the door. Pedro's llamas stood before it, swaying, lurching *en masse* this way and that, straining at their rope corral, alarmed at the horrid screeching and the strange men. A trooper deftly slipped the rope and sent them scampering in all directions. Cooly he tested the cord against three of his fellows, jerking upon it. Good. It would hold.

So with Pedro's same rope, in the same place as they had hanged his father, they hanged Don Jaime, the son.

The grim man gave a curt command to one of the troopers, who entered the house. He snapped another order to the rest, who followed him at a swift trot. In less than a minute they had all disappeared round the curve of the barren gravel ridge. There were other *haciendas* to be visited.

Pedro lay on the floor in the profaned sanctuary. Dizzy, frightened, half-expecting the roof to fall or some other violent upheaval to take place. But nothing happened. He was perplexed. His simple reasoning powers grappled with the phenomenon. Could it possibly be true, then, that the great señors were beyond the pale of sanctuary? Outside he heard the horrible screeching grow fainter, rise to a final desperate crescendo, gurgle, and stop abruptly. A short silence. Then the swift clatter of hoofs. Silence again. Then presently a new sound, a snapping, crackling, low roaring sound.

Shakily he got to his feet and made his way to the door. He was in time to see his llamas careering all over the plain, and a crowd of peons standing, staring dully at something. Staring at what? He strained his eyes.

Sancta Maria! At his rope! With the body of Don Jaime hanging at the end of it.

At the same moment the lone trooper galloped past, and simultaneously the first great tongue of flame roared up into the sky from the roof of the old *hacienda*.

PEDRO had a much more difficult job to rescue his rope this time than he had had before. The old *hacienda* was a tinder-box of worm-eaten woodwork, and when it went, it went almost like gunpowder. But save it he did; though at the expense of some blistered hide. Had he kept his poncho on when he climbed the gibbet, he would surely have protected his skin. But ponchos are articles of price. The very dyes—even in a home-made one—cost some five or six weeks of his earnings. While skin—well, skin grows again. Anyhow the rope was safe.

Pedro had no time to stand around with his fellow peons and applaud the fireworks. His llamas were spreading all over the landscape, and it would take several days of arduous labor to herd the contrary creatures together again. He would lose on his share of the week's supply of fuel—quite sixty or seventy cents.

A deep resentment began to take form in his mind against this person who interfered so persistently with his affairs. The blow he had received in the face was nothing to him. He had already forgotten all about that. An Aymara is accustomed to accept blows as part of his every day fare. That the grim man who hanged two kind masters one after the other was no sort of factor in the sum of his wrongs.

What difference did masters make in the life of a peon? But why did the man always want to pick on his rope? That was what rankled, just as the enforced loan of a prized marble by the school bully rankles in any other childish mind. And seventy cents was as acute a loss as the same amount of pocket money; a matter not easily to be forgotten.

In the days that followed, chill days when it rained, and sweaty days when it did not—for the sun in that shelterless barrenness can be as hot as the wind is cold—breathless days always—when his sling arm ached from urging his wild charges into the strait and narrow path, his resentment developed into the sullen hostility which comes so easily to the Aymara against his masters.

He had little leisure, and not very much mental capacity, to speculate just who would be his immediate master in the near future, or whether he would still be an envied herder of llamas. Somebody would be master. That much was sure. And thirty llamas had been in his charge, and he would have to account for them. That was all he knew. And that was quite enough to occupy all his attention for the present.

So he toiled and sweated and sulked and whirled his sling like a David and threw his *lazo* like a cow-puncher; and at the end of a week he brought all the thirty home again to their corral.

And found nothing changed at all.

The same peons worked in the fields with the same energy. The same *administrador* strode among them with the same long whip. Word had come to him from La Paz to administrate and to render an accounting to such persons as would presently be appointed. And he, not knowing how exacting such appointee might be, administered with vigor.

And so, except for an occasional extra cut with the whip over the back, life for Pedro went on with exactly the same joyless monotony as before. What indeed did it matter which great señor quarreled with whom, or who lived, or which was hanged? What difference did the name of the master make? Toil was as unchanging an institution as was peonage. Much more important was the possession of a good rope which prevented llamas from running away.

Pedro settled down once more to his routine, and, except for his smoldering resentment, was contented with his lot and perhaps even grateful—though he was beginning to be rather bewildered as to exactly whom he should be grateful. But the good Padre Urquidi had made a special visit immediately after the tragedy and had exhorted him powerfully in the right path. And Pedro, though his faith had been somewhat strained recently, was really very simple-minded and devout.

He went to mass and made his confession as often as he could—which was normally about twice a year when the *padre* managed to get round on his regular visits at about the time of the *fiestas* of *Guadelupe* and the *Invencion de la Cruz*. After the ceremony, when the *padre* had blessed them all and gone on his way, Pedro, and his fraternity brothers of the secret club to which he belonged, would put on huge hats of radiating egret's-feathers, six feet in diameter, representing the sun's rays, and masks with white painted eyes, and would do the queerest imaginable dance in the *patio* of the little church—exactly as may be seen on the stone walls of the ancient city of Cuzco.

Neither Pedro nor any one of his fellows could have explained why they did these things. They did them because their grandfathers had done them; and their grandfathers had forgotten why.

After that they would all get very drunk on fifty per cent. cane-alcohol—smuggled across Lake Titicaca from the Peruvian border on a *tortora* reed-raft—and under the spell of the excoriating liquor their enervated subservience would fall from them and the old insurgent Adam would dominate them once more—the same savage fighting spirit of their forefathers who battled so valiantly against the devastating Incas that they never were conquered, but admitted to honorable treaty. Pedro and his friends would forget then that they were miserable subjugated peons and would fight fiercely with one another. So savagely that sometimes some of them died. Which was to be deplored. But who could blame Pedro? These *fiestas* were the only holidays he had, and were the nearest thing he knew to a Sunday-school picnic.

When an unfortunate club member died there was another ceremony which the good *padre* knew nothing about. It happened at night and was all very dim and confused. But it seemed to consist of the other members attaching themselves to one another with a long rope tied to their left arms—Pedro's rope was very good for this—and dancing a slow measure round the body, weaving a snake pattern and intoning a monotonous nasal dirge of just two notes.

After weary hours of this without variation the body would be taken out on a frail raft and dropped into the unfathomed depths of Lake Titicaca, off the island where the ruins of the ancient Temple of the Moon still stands. After that Pedro would put his rope away for five days and would use an old piece of knotted scrap instead. For the time being his own cherished *lazo* became something imbued with a queer superstition and reverence.

The *padre* then, upon his next visit, would be shown a little mound and told—

"Here we buried Felipe who died."

And the *padre* would duly consecrate the spot.

So, feasting, fighting, and toiling—above all toiling—sped another Arcadian six months of the even tenor of their way. Then one day, with no more warning than before, the grim man once again rode round the curve of the bare gravel ridge, and a small company of soldiers tramped in even unison at his horse's heels.

He sat, statuesque, cold, and aloof as ever, enveloped in his great cloak in the stinging sleet—it was one of Winter's last furies before giving up—while his men scoured the fields for the *administrador*, with whom it had become a habit to be wholesomely absent whenever that ominous figure appeared on its great black horse.

HOWEVER he was presently produced, and to him the grim man showed an imposing paper with a seal attached to it; and immediately the *administrador* bowed very low indeed before him and was ingratiatingly subservient. Thereupon, at a curt word from their commander, the soldiers clumped gratefully into the church—there was no other place—and stacked arms and loosened their belts and lighted up the inevitable *charutos*.

But the grim man spent the rest of the afternoon riding around in the storm with the *administrador* and comparing field boundaries with his wet sheets of paper.

In the meanwhile the soldiers, having smoked and stamped themselves reasonably warm, sent two of their number to the nearest stone corral, where they coolly selected a tender looking llama, slaughtered it, and cut up the meat. Pedro looked on, scowling and helpless. A llama in his eyes represented about five dollars worth of fuel in a year. His resentment blazed within him, but his face showed only dull, sulky apathy.

Late in the dusk the grim man and his conductor came back from their survey, and the former was heard to say:

"Very good. You will have that site cleared by Thursday, then, and on Friday the builders will come. You will quarter them somewhere."

Thus it became known that this was the new master. The word traveled round among the peons, and they grunted and went on with their business.

The new master found time at last to be hungry. He stamped into the church and shook the frozen sleet from his cloak. A soldier removed his boots. Another lighted a flickering lantern. His saddle and saddlebags were brought in and food was served by a dozen obsequious hands. He ate and uttered a single remark—

"My horse?"

A soldier saluted briskly.

"He is stabled, excellency."

He was—in the hut of the nearest Indian, who had been told to stable himself with any other pig he cared. The grim new master nodded and smoked moodily.

Pedro stood sulkily in the corner, scared, yet loyally jealous of the premises in his charge. Nobody minded him. In fact, it was fitting that a menial be present to do the errands of the soldiers.

The new master shivered slightly and thought of bed. A bed had already been prepared for him in a corner under the narrow, heavily-carved overhang which passed by the name of the choir gallery. A thick pad of blankets—collected from neighboring huts—over which his own gear had been spread. He surveyed it with disfavor and shivered again.

A whirl of snow sifted in through the shaky door jamb and settled itself upon the little drift which had formed inside. The wind devils shrieked down the vast slopes of old Iliammpu, at whose very feet the lake lay, and thundred on the heavy door and tore at the feeble flame of the lantern.

"*Dios!*" the new master shuddered. "It's draughty in here. Stretch a rope and hang some sort of wind shelter across that corner."

"A rope! *Inmediatamente, mio General.*"

There stood Pedro, of course, with a rope round his waist right handy.

Pedro's resistance this time was no more than sullenly passive. He knew better, from his past experience, than to struggle. His face showed only the dull, sulky submissiveness of the properly trained Aymara peon. He kept his eyes lowered. The animal glare in them might have told something. Always his rope this man had to pick on. That the good God blight him! His rope was to Pedro something he needed a dozen times in his everyday life. Something he lived with, ate with, slept with. It had acquired something of the nature of a fetish. The most useful and cherished possession of a man who had no more than two or three possessions in the whole world. Not a mere line from which to hang señors and blankets. Yet three times had he met this great excellency the general, and three times had his rope been wrested from him and desecrated.

But from Pedro's demeanor the measure of savage resentment that boiled up within him was not to be gaged at all.

So the soldiers took the rope and stretched it across the corner from pegs which they drove into the adobe wall. More blankets were easy to collect—there was one to each family in the neighboring huts—and in a few minutes quite a cozy corner had been made for the autocrat's bed. Pedro slunk away.

The great man grunted a short commendation, and, satisfied for himself, found time to ask casually—

"Where are you men quartered?"

It was illuminative of the most excellent training of the soldiers that it had never occurred to them to sleep in the same church as the excellency; and, like well-trained men, they had made all the necessary arrangements without being told.

"We sleep in the hut just without the wall, excellency. Conveniently close should the excellency call."

Conveniently close indeed. It was the sacristan's hut.

"Good. Who has the key to this door? Good. I will not be disturbed till morning."

The soldiers saluted and went. The new master, spending the first night in his new estate, shivered uncomfortably and grumbled about the cold which bit right into the bones in that high altitude. Relieved from observing eyes, the pose of the stern man of iron fell from him. He stretched and relaxed. Then yawned prodigiously. Then stooped to his saddle-bags, groaning as his joints creaked, and drew out a fat, pint-flask of brandy. He gulped down a good half of it, belched heavily, smacked his lips with a loud *aa-aa-rh*, and rolled into bed as an old campaigner should, with his martial cloak around him.

An eery place to sleep in; a bare, unused church, musty with the smell of damp adobe and wet matting and moldy bean-pods and raw wool. The wind shrieked round the squat edifice looking for chinks in the high narrow windows through which it might whirl a fine spray of snow. It hummed around the eaves and whistled in under the door and snatched at the dim lantern flame and threw black shadows of grotesque devils on the whitewashed wall. It hurled itself in solid gusts and struck muffled lugubrious notes from the old Spanish bell.

The ponderous beams of the roof groaned and the carved balustrade of the gallery creaked, and all the ghosts of the men who had been given to the deeps of the Island of the Moon, who now lived on the icy peaks of old Iliammpu, rushed howling down the chill slopes and danced on the roof.

The Indians in the neighboring huts, who could not sleep because they had no blankets, heard them and cowered. The great excellency heard them in his sleep and shivered. It was chilly in that bare old church. And draughty. *Dios mio*, how draughty!

The excellency cursed in his semi-drunken sleep and shivered again. Then he opened a splenetic eye to look for more covering, and saw that the sheltering blanket screen had fallen. *Carramba*, no wonder the draught had awakened him. Fool soldiers. They should have tied the things onto the rope. He would tell them off in the morning, curse their stupid hides.

Grumbling and shivering, he got up to hang them over the rope again—and found the rope gone!

"*Por la Sanctissima!* What deviltry was this? Where the ——"

And at that moment a short loop of the rope dropped over his head and a tremendous heave from above lifted him six inches off the ground.

To the credit of the grim new master it must be said that if he had yelled for help then he would have saved himself. But his natural ferocious reaction to the outrage was to fight. He flung his hands up to grasp the strangling thing and tear it from his neck. But standing on the very pinnacle of tip-toe is a difficult position to fight from. The next instant came another fierce heave, and he was lifted just off the pinnacle. Only an inch. But it might as well have been a mile.

Then it was too late. That thin circle round his wind-pipe with all the weight of his body on it choked the mightiest attempt of his lungs down to a spluttering hiss. Desperately, with boggling eyes, he tore and clawed at the taut deadliness above his head and tried to lift himself out of the awful constriction.

But a thin rope is a very difficult thing to climb hand over hand, especially if the hands are soft from much good living; and the rope of Pedro Mendez was greasy from continued contact with Pedro's body and with the necks of llamas.

The grim man's teeth clenched grimmer than ever in his life. His lips grinned outwards and down as his neck muscles strained their futile utmost. His eyes started almost out of their bursting sockets. His hands, like talons, clawed desperately in the air above his head, sometimes gripping the rope, more often missing it. His legs kicked spasmodically to jerk his body higher, or strained alternately to reach lower. Just that one little inch—which might as well have been a mile.

Pedro turned two half-hitches of his rope over the head of a cherub carved in high relief on the balustrade of the choir gallery and watched the dim struggle below. As the storm blatted and shrieked round the roof he was confident that divine wrath was about to manifest itself this time and crush him in the ruins. But nothing happened. Crouching like a devil in the shadows above, he watched the last shudder cease and the last tremor of the tortured body pass. And still nothing happened. Perhaps it *was* true then. Sanctuary with its laws was not applicable to these great señors, just as the excellency had said. He had hardly believed it was really so, though. But apparently the señor had spoken truth.

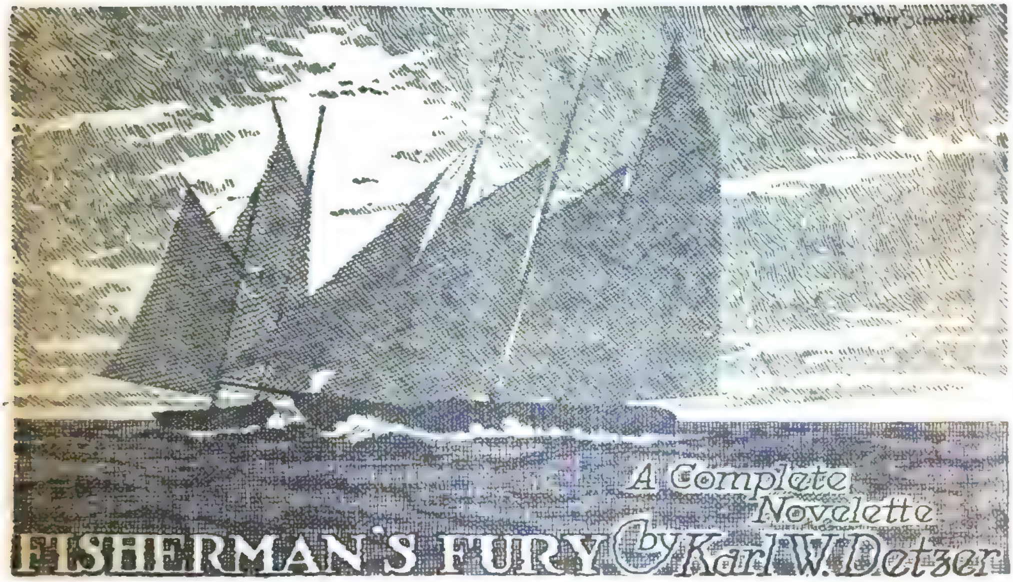
Pedro came down from the gallery and stood before the staring, grinning horror and stared at it in turn without any expression at all. Then he stretched forth his fore-finger and held it against the thing's chest so that its ghost might be able to hear, and he explained to it in guttural monosyllabic Aymara, all the things that had vexed his simple soul for so long and had impelled him to do this deed. And the ghosts of the Island of the Moon howled upon the roof in approval.

Having thus made his peace with the ghost that it might not haunt him, he crawled very methodically into the great excellency's bed and went to sleep—for the sacristan's hut was occupied by the soldiers.

IN THE chill morning, very early, as the habit of llama herders, he woke up and climbed the crumbling stairs to the gallery. Methodically he lowered the body to the ground. With his teeth he worried the knot loose from the bloated neck. Something, he did not know what, impelled him to place the frozen body in the bed.

Then he took his rope, slipped out by the little sacristy door into the driving storm, collected thirty of his llamas, loaded them up with their little sacks of fuel, and started off for La Paz market.

For it was Saturday, and on a bitter day like this his profit might amount to nearly two dollars.



Author of "Smoke, Wind and Water" and "The Pantry Watch."

THE story of Captain Clarke's coming was in Mackinac before him. No one asked who had brought it, whether some swift trading-schooner had sailed out of Detroit after him, or Indian runners had carried it along the shore-trail around Saginaw Bay.

But when he stepped out of the fog at the piers that morning, with a seagull feather in his cap, there was curious whispering in the Astor warehouses, and even the Indians left their encampment on the shore to watch him pass.

Captain Nathaniel Clarke was a little

man, as stature was measured on the Great Lakes frontiers in 1835. But his shoulders were broad with carrying, his arms hung long and loosely, and his feet straddled out sailor fashion. He walked up the pier from his tar-spattered open boat, following his own straight nose, and looking neither at the fur men on the left of the road, nor the Indians who hunched lazily in their beaded blankets at the right.

The seagull feather was a symbol that some traders feared, others scoffed at; an enemy badge in the eyes of all. For it was the defiant mark of the fishing-fleet, the bold crew from islands of northern Lake Michigan. They were lone adventurers, those men, who turned their backs on the military posts, who fought their own battles, and occasionally, if their temper had enough black bile, sent an ugly shot at the trapper who wandered too far beyond his rightful domain. There was bad blood in that day between the fishermen and the outside world, and the American soldiers at Fort Mackinac looked over the pickets on their hill-top and wondered uneasily what was best to do about it.

Captain Nathaniel Clarke left the trading-post behind him and walked stiffly up the road to the fort, his sea-legs kinking rebelliously on the incline. Lieutenant McHenry, commander of the post, had been watching from the west block-house. Before the figure was half-way up the hillside, he was at the gate, his challenge ahead of that of the private soldier on guard.

"I'm here for words with the commander!"

Captain Clarke blew with violence through his nose and eyed the youthful lieutenant critically.

He was a longish lad, but too smooth of face, with white eyelashes. He kept his shako high on his head and Captain Clarke, when he saw its stiff blue plume, planted his own cap on again; this time its white feather rose boldly in front.

"At your service! I am Lieutenant McHenry, post commandant."

Captain Clarke hung on his heel, awaiting an invitation to enter the white picket fence. But as the officer completely blocked the gate, standing with his arms upon his narrow hips and his sword dangling, there was nothing to do except wait.

"Are you asking me in?" Captain Clarke inquired at length, tilting his head to one side, "or am I to cool my heels on the door-step of your porch like an Indian beggar?"

He was plainly ruffled, for his tan face went puffy, and he jerked his chin with each word, as if to give emphasis. But Lieutenant McHenry was his match, having red hair and a tongue of his own.

"I have not invited you in," he replied very coolly, "for I don't know you from Pontiac. If you'll be so good as to state your name and your business, there's a kettle on the hearth and a bottle of rum beside it in my quarters."

"You're a formal upstart!" growled Captain Clarke, and the private soldier stirred around open-mouthed, then ran his finger down along his gun latch. "But if it's the etiquette that's annoying of you, if it's annoying of you more'n that farm-hand there is annoying of me—" he fixed his eye on the soldier—"then here's my credentials—Clarke, Nathaniel, Captain of the Schooner *Manitou*, Commodore of the Michigan fishing-fleet, home port Gull Island, and bound there this voyage from Detroit, where I had the pleasure, I beg to tell you, of viewing a fort as had seasoned men in command and less luggage in their attitude. I'm here to talk a matter of business with the United States Government, God preserve it!"

"Come in, captain," replied Lieutenant McHenry dryly, "but you might leave your insinuations on the step. I can't be too careful who I admit to the reservation."

The fisherman followed the younger man across the flagstone yard to the officers' house, that lay behind the barracks and the hospital. Neither spoke as they approached the whitewashed building with its deep windows and green cedar shutters, but Captain Clarke was swallowing hard, as if trying to hold his words.

The post commander scraped his feet on a willow mat at the door and looked meaningly at the seaman, who kicked his tarry boots across it with a show of distaste.

"Now what may I do for you?" asked McHenry, once they were seated before the fire of pine knots and the hot rum was in their hands.

Captain Clarke cleared his throat vigorously, and then again, as if to use time. The hot drink had warmed his disposition. He began to talk more pleasantly.

"Twenty year," he answered, "I sailed the lakes, ten of it here in this wilderness.

And never before did I come whining at any man's door for what I'm asking now. Here!"

Getting to his feet, he undid the buckles of his blue sea-jacket, and showed a red waistcoat underneath. About his middle hung a heavy leather belt. This he stripped off, and thumped it upon the table, so that it clinked with the coins that were in it.

"That's gold—one thousand, eight hundred American dollars!" he exclaimed, scowling, "and not a penny of it mine! My own I carry in my pocket, and any one as chooses can try to take it from me!"

He snorted. Lieutenant McHenry had not moved. Banging the table with a thick. scarred fist, Captain Clarke continued:

"But this other—it belongs to the men of my fleet, their pay for the Summer's catch. Now I happened to hear that there's a parcel of ragged traders somewhere between here and Little Traverse Bay, that are cramping their sticky fingers to get into this belt. I'm leaving tonight for Gull Island, two boys and me in an open boat, and I'd be obliged for a squad of your men to go with me."

He slid back in his chair, and drawing a fine linen cloth from his pocket, wiped his wrinkled forehead.

"And the first time," he muttered, half to himself, "that I ever had to go cadge my needs o' any one!"

Lieutenant McHenry shook his head.

"I wish I could accommodate," he replied earnestly. "But I can't spare a man. The garrison has only thirty, and ten of them are down on their backs with the scurvy, which leaves twenty to stand the whole guard. That's not enough, sir, to operate the post, let alone sending any out with you."

His smooth, round face, lost its severe look in the top of his teacup.

"Our job is here first," he added, and reached to the hearth for the kettle. Captain Clarke shoved his own cup from the other's hand.

"You refuse me?" he demanded angrily.

"I can't do otherwise, captain," the lieutenant spoke uneasily. "I have not the men. I advise you to wait. Be my guest here a few days, perhaps some other party going your direction will come through. You can go out together then."

Getting violently to his feet, Captain Clarke picked up the heavy belt and strapped it tight about his waist. He buttoned his coat, starting methodically at the top, which fastened stiffly under his chin, and brushing out the folds after each button. He spoke, his hand on the knob:

"If there's no help, there is none, and I'll waste no time mewing over it. But if I should get back to my islands, where I am going now, and you should ever set your sails in that direction, I want you to call on me.

"I promise you here that you'll not get the ague waiting on my door-step, while myself or men asks unnecessary questions. And this, too, if you should be forced to come begging help, I won't go inventing excuses about giving it. Now as to you and your fancy uniforms, I believe I can get along plenty safe without. Good day to you!"

Down in the village the traders were watching for him. When he returned alone, with a sour face and stiff neck, a half-grown boy sprang up from the sand at the bottom of the hill. He made off along the beach to a group of untidy fellows. Captain Clarke shook his fist as the crowd of shoremen slipped out of sight through the fog.

He found his boat, a mean craft rigged fore-and-aft with patched canvas and too many splices in her ropes. She was empty, and he whistled through his teeth for the boys who had been his crew. A squaw, with a papoose on her back, watched him disinterestedly.

"Did you see the boys?" he asked her in the Ottawa dialect that every fisherman and trapper on the north lakes knew in those days.

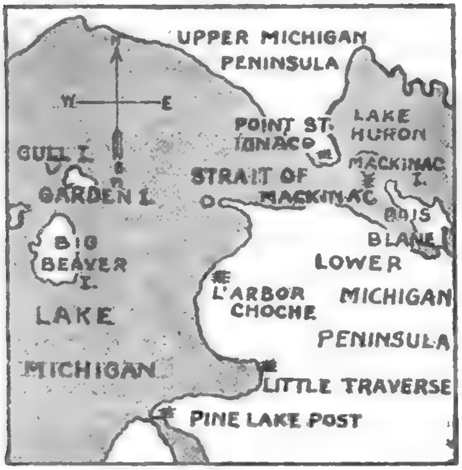
"They left," she answered. "Men gave them jobs on shore."

So that was how the wind lay! Even his boys deserted! There was no help for it—he would go on alone; let the traders find him, once he got into the fog! He looked back up the hill toward the bold picket stockade.

"I seen enough o' them yellow skirts," he growled. "Thirty men, and me only needing one of them!"

He lifted up the spliced loops of his moor-lines. As he cast off and hoisted the canvas on his squeaking spars, he thought comfortably of the brass mounted pistols under the tails of his jacket.

HE SAILED straight south, toward Bois Blanc Head, while the breeze stiffened and his booms held firmer against it. Over stern the rumble of the trading-post died away in the obscure silence of the fog. He propped his eyes wide open, twisting his head like a weather vane. Once safe off shore he changed course, cutting northwest, so as to run with a margin past the rocky point at the end of Mackinac. He hoped to keep that course toward St. Ignace, and then swing south again into Lake Michigan. And he hoped, too, that the fog would hold. It would take more than one crew of trappers to find him if the weather remained thick.



He had sailed two hours, so he judged. His sea eyes, bent down overside, told him well enough that he was running west of the island. The water was clearer now, rid of the weeds and foam that dirtied the current of the south channel. He lay over on his tiller, for he hoped to avoid the rocks that pile up on the coast off Point St. Ignace.

The nose of his blunt, dirty craft pulled deeper into the wind. He lashed his helm; as he caught the rope over, his vigilant ears picked up the sound of voices.

Men were shouting noisy commands that came in halves through the fog. Captain Clarke eased his rudder. His wet fingers slipped in the first attempt and, pulling savagely, he tried again. He let the boat run with the breeze, which was stiffening. But he was not quick enough. Through the wall of mist slit a tilted bowsprit, and alongside, so close that the fisherman's boat tipped on end in her swell, there rolled upward the gray side of a schooner.

Eyes on board were too busy with bad weather. The big craft lunged past him, and no one gave the alarm. It was not an out-going trader's ship, Captain Clarke reflected, for there would have been lookouts on watch for him, and he should not have escaped so easily. He swung around, and picked up wind for his new tack, south into Lake Michigan.

II

THE sea had risen with the afternoon and the fog lay thick, crawling close upon the water. Captain Clarke had sailed south, and when the wind slid around on his starboard side, had beaten back north again. He hoped that the sundown might break the haze upon the horizon, as it does so often on the north lakes, stitching a red fringe of afterglow to the soggy gray blanket of moisture.

That would give him his bearings. All pretense at direction was gone miles before. It was no gay prospect to spend a night on the lake, for the coasts were steep and rocky; besides, there were the traders at the ports who would grin at the sight of his spars bouncing helpless.

Darkness disappointed him. A heavier fog slipped ahead as its escort, and the sun held down behind it. Wrapping an oilskin about his shoulders, Captain Clarke reefed up his mainsheet. He would turn south again, where the whole lake lay open, except for the Manitous, and in the morning, if the fog dropped, he would find his way back to Gull Island.

He settled down in the stern of his little craft, with the lashed tiller thumping hard against his arm. The seas were running high with frothy lips, and all about was the hiss of white-caps. Uncertainly he felt the belt inside his shirt. It was womanish, this fear of his.

"We got better company right now than on shore," he growled. "A fog is better sorts than some folks as I know." He thought of his deserting boys.

"Land's a thieving place——"

Something halted him, heavier than the surface waves, the sound of a breaker that ripped across the dark. Captain Clarke stood up, leaning against the wind, listening—again the crash of water upon rock.

This time he threw off the lashings and dragged the tiller hard over.

He was none too soon. As his full mainsail slid into the wind a rock gleamed wet on the starboard side, not a boat length off, where the sea was dashing with a loud moaning noise. Next he heard a similar sound to port. The keel of his boat slid over the edge of a second rock, this time not so high as the first, but still close enough to the surface to break the waves.

"White Shoals!"

Captain Clarke realized too late where the contrary winds had blown him. Ten miles off his course, he had hit blindly that most treacherous reef of the whole north lakes, barring the one at the mouth of Good Harbor Bay.

Water was spouting all around him now, lifting like fountains where the waves ran into hidden ledges, or lying still between the reefs. He beat forward a mile, letting chance, not seamanship, guide him where the way was deep.

Then dead ahead, not a stone's throw from the bow, a mad white gusher poured up twelve feet above him and slapped cold fingers of spray across the night. He threw over his helm too late. His stout black craft splashed through the first roller; then with a hollow, grunting sound, she crunched down the ragged edge of the rock.

Water sluiced through a hole in her side; she heeled, with silly canvas flapping like the wings of a wounded gull. A second wave pitched her far up on the reef. She teetered a moment, in a half-human frenzy at her own danger. Then her planking ripped off and eager water tumbled in.

Captain Clarke crawled forward and felt for the hole. Slimy, wet rock repelled his hand. The boat leaned more easily now, balanced on the reef. Seas broke over her, pitting their power against her soaked deck and riggings. Overhead, her sails thumped loose. The useless main-sheet sagged into the water. Its taut line snapped, weary halyards parted, and a heap of canvas thrummed down noisily across the side. Captain Clarke made himself fast to the spar.

He had clung to his wreck for several hours, with the lake raining high sprays in upon him, or rolling across his body in stinging cold racks of foam. Then came a break in the fog, abruptly, and a single star looked down, with a surprized expression; after another hour the whole sky was clear.

Where the islands of upper Lake Michigan lift their dune beaches out from a clean, mighty water, the northern lights have a particular luminance. They show up these islands and the shoals off the Straits of Mackinac, not as scenery, but as landmarks to the sailor, and now while Captain Clarke stiffened on his spar, they cast the whole surface into sharp outlines.

Shaking the wet from his sound sea eyes, he even made out the dark strip of coast along the northern peninsula, and thought he could see the spots to the southwest where lay Gull Island, his own belated destination. Just before dawn a biting wind streaked across the water, gnawing the seaman's hands. The light spread after it, and with the light he sighted indistinctly a tall sailing vessel.

She was beating hard, but the day was at her heels, and overhauled her. Captain Clarke made out, with a good deal of relief, that she was a three-masted schooner, no longshore trading-craft. Her canvas shone yellow and blue in the early light, and her hull rolled black on the water. Her course lay straight his way, too near the shoals, he saw, to keep her keel off bottom.

Now, not a mile away, he distinguished figures upon her decks. They saw him, to all appearances. He unleashed the rope and stood weakly on his feet. His danger seemed less now; he was ashamed to wave his arms. It made no matter. For the vessel had shifted her course, bearing more toward him, and he was not surprized when she whipped around into the wind and stood with flapping canvas, while several men tumbled into the dory that trailed in the waves behind her.

They made toward him through the choppy seas, with four sailors puffing at the oars, and a tall man standing in the stern. The sea struck their boats, rested, and struck again. As it fell back an enormous rock slit the water savagely and Captain Clarke, from the side of his wreck, yelled out:

"Look out for yourselves!"

The wind, small as it was, took his voice away in a mad race, and in the same gust, brought their cry to him.

"Captain Brill's compliments," the man in the stern was calling, "Schooner *Witch of the Wave* will take you off!"

Again Captain Clarke tried to shout. He tried, dully, to think. Schooner *Witch of the Wave?* He never had heard of her.

"They's bad water," he made answer at length. "Aye, I'll be thanking you!"

"Wait your thanks for a fair day!" an acid French-Canadian tongue called back to him.

Captain Clarke bit his teeth together. He braced his back, and the wind whipped his soaked breeches so that they flapped against his legs.

That infernal accent! French—not the French of France, but that patois colored by English, which traders, trappers, and voyageurs spoke in the north! It stung the fisherman's ears, for it was the hated tongue of a trading-post, of the half-breeds and hangers-on who were the habitual and incessant enemies of fisherfolk.

His mouth tightened. This was no way to be—rescued by a ragged crowd of traders! He, Captain Clarke of the fishing-fleet, picked off a reef by men he despised! He grunted as the small boat edged the sharp blade of rock and pulled closer.

A young seaman, swollen in oilskins, slid overside into shoal water that came to his armpits.

"Was you blind with tar?" he demanded roughly. "Wastin' folks' time on rocks the whole world is knowin' of?"

He waded forward, indifferent of foothold, until his bulging knees hit the submerged gunwale.

"Stand away," Captain Clarke ordered. "I wasn't asking rescue!"

"Drop him off," said another voice.

Captain Clarke caught the useless end of his tiller. He tried to brace his slipping feet against the rod, determined not to be taken. But the broad-shouldered youth, swearing at his fall, leaped to the tilted deck and picked him up bodily.

III

CAPTAIN CLARKE opened his eyes and his fists at the same time, in a ship's cabin, with several men leaning over him.

"The seagull feather," a fellow was saying, in a voice that smacked of the lower lakes and the east, broader than the tang of most early sailors upon the shores of the wilderness. "That's the sign of the fishing fleet."

He stooped over, squinting his eyes to have a good look at the rescued man's face.

"I say to you it's the one," he declared triumphantly when he had looked enough. "Clothes and chin and feather and all. It's the very one they was telling about at Mackinac."

There was a racket outside, of wind hitting loose doors. Captain Clarke roused himself.

"He's a brassy look about him, you're right in that," a second was commenting.

"The look of a sailor," another interrupted.

Captain Clarke sat up stiffly, with his head banging and his throat tight with cold. His eyes saw dimly. His words, when he tried to use them, seemed to come in jerks from some other man's mouth. But he was aboard ship, he knew the motion; and dully he made out that he lay, full-dressed, in a berth in quarters rather finer and larger than those on most schooners of the upper lakes.

A bearded man, with active black eyes set too close together, sat with arms akimbo on the bunk beside him. Captain Clarke, staring at him, saw in his face the sea-burnt look of the sailor. His brown hands were big with veins, as if their owner were used to weights. He seemed to be pleased with unexpected company. Captain Clarke remembered his money-belt and reached for it awkwardly. It still was there, untouched. But the bearded man, misinterpreting his motion, laughed.

"We took the pistols. Pretty ones they were too."

"I want them," Captain Clarke answered emphatically.

His bedside host listened, laughed, and shook his head cock-surely.

"Don't be squally, don't be squally," he urged. "They were spoilt with water, but you'll get them back when we are safe in port."

"And who are you?"

"I? I'm Captain Brill—Enos Brill, Schooner *Witch of the Wave*, your rescuer, if you please!"

"That's pretty enough put!" answered Captain Clarke, "and before you're required to go making inquiries, I'll tell you, also, that I am Captain Nathaniel Clarke, Schooner *Manitou*, commodore of the Michigan fishing-fleet. As to your impudent men tugging me off that rock, I thank you kindly. But now, where do you plan to land me?"

"Little Traverse," answered Captain Brill.

"That you'll not!"

Captain Clarke sat upright on the edge of the bunk.

"I'll land nowhere on that mainland coast," he said furiously, "either there or on Pine Lake or any other thieving trading-post."

He slid his feet, still wet, to the floor. Other figures were in range now, standing back from the light of the swinging lamp, shadows whose size or ages or shapes he could not make out; knowing only that they were men.

"Where do we prefer that we drop you off?" asked Captain Brill.

"At my own dock—Gull Island—if you will. Or if not there, and you're putting in at Little Traverse, you might run in along the coast close by, at Arbor Croche, where there's a mission and a priest and some Indians that have honest blood in them."

There was a sudden movement among the other men, and the scuff of boots, coming forward, accompanied a new voice.

"Aren't you rather quick with your tongue, Captain Clarke?" the newcomer asked. "Do you mean that all the men of Little Traverse are scoundrels?"

Clarke looked through the half-light of the cabin at a tall, slender man in decent tweed clothing, shore clothing with not a seam of the sea about it.

"I'm no quicker with my tongue than I am with my ears and my eyes," he replied hotly. "And I'm not asking any leeshore tailor to come telling me the ways of the lake! For the long face of you, I'd take you to be a clerk among them thieving blanket pedlers, or I'm far mistaken!"

"I'm not asking your compliments nor your insolence," answered the tall man, stepping boldly into the lamplight. "But I'm advising you to hold your tongue. As for Little Traverse, that's where you're going. This is not my ship—it's Captain Brill's here, but I'm a man for fair play.

"Who was it risked his vessel to pick you off that rock, where you sprawled like a winded rabbit? Who pumped good liquor down your throat and warmed your hands with his own till you opened your eyes? Who offered you safe passage on his schooner, without so much as asking your thanks, which would be cheap payment? Why Captain Brill did, and the traders at Little Traverse are his friends. His own blood brother's among them! And you lather your tongue with slimy words against your betters."

He stopped, winded, leaning forward now, very red in the face, and his fist banging against the bulkhead with every word. But before Captain Clarke could reply, his angry upbraider had found his breath.

"This ain't my ship, I'm only a passenger, going to Little Traverse on affairs of my own. But I want to see fair play and I object to hearing honest men called thieves."

"Will your objecting turn black to white?" asked Captain Clarke. "Will it give a squaw yellow hair or turn dog-fish to trout? No, nor thieving rascals to honest men, either!"

Captain Brill, who had withdrawn from the argument, stood up now, a jerky roll in his legs, more the sailor than ever.

"Come on! A lot of good you'll do arguing. Shake hands and be sociable. I've ordered a drink."

Captain Clarke, still snorting, shook his head.

"I want none of your liquor." He braced his back against a partition. "I'm desiring one thing. That's to be set ashore."

Captain Brill looked less pleasant. But he stayed cool.

"Mr. Hoham!" he called.

A third man, evidently the mate, stepped forward, and looked from under yellow eyebrows at the rescued fisherman.

"Wasn't you to Mackinac yesterday?" he asked. "Wasn't you on the road to the fort?"

"If I was, it was on my own affairs," replied Captain Clarke.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Hoham," Captain Brill addressed the mate, "that our huffy guest doesn't relish our company. We'll go on deck, and if it's possible at all, we'll drop him off at Arbor Croche tonight." He turned to Captain Clarke. "I don't haul no man against his will."

The mate stepped aside and Captain Brill, nodding shortly, moved away into a dark passage. The shoreman, for it was evident from his voice and attitude as well as from his clothes that he was not of the lakes, followed. Mr. Hoham, the mate, tramped after them.

Captain Clarke listened till thumping feet scraped the deck overhead. Then he slid off the bunk and walked, unsteadily, across the cabin. The door was shut.

Through the single porthole he looked out toward a misty horizon. His knees were stiff, his head still hovered lightly above his shoulders. His eyes hurt.

But that man Brill! He looked like a hard-headed seaman, and his mate—Hoham—there was a shifty customer. Inquiring whether he's been at Mackinac? Then they guessed who he was and that he carried a belt of gold. But why hadn't they taken it? They had plenty of time before he came to his senses.

An unpinned hatch cover banged in the wind outside. Down the companionway a shuffle of feet, noisy in the midst of noise, became suddenly silent when the racket ceased. A board creaked. Captain Clarke strode again to the door and this time opened it. A dark blur, blacker than the unlighted passage, scampered away. So some one was watching!

A fine ship, this *Witch of the Wave!* Captain Clarke glanced around the lamp-lighted cabin. It was a tidy compartment, with cupboards and lockers, all fastened against too curious fingers. Save for these and the single bunk, the place was empty. Every movable piece of furnishing had been removed, either by design or accident. Again he returned to the bunk. Lifting the straw tick and blankets cautiously, to the attendant scramble of cockroaches, he drew a pine slat from the bed. Four feet long, four inches wide, stout—it would do in an emergency.

He dropped it noiselessly under the blanket, and whirled around at a knock on the door.

"Tea, sir."

A seaman entered, carrying a pail that steamed energetically.

"Captain Brill's compliments, sir."

"My thanks to Captain Brill," replied Captain Clarke with stiff formality.

He drank the tea and his spine warmed. Arms and legs still ached from the cold water, but his head was clearer. He thought of the poor, tarry boat he had left to rot on White Shoals, and he sighed a little in spite of himself. He thought of the boys who had deserted at Mackinac, and his brow went black.

The cabin was silent now, except for the thump of sea-boots on the deck above and the wash of water against the sides. Somewhere a block was squeaking, a companionable sound. The schooner was skipping along, with a talking prow that gossiped with the waves. And Captain Brill?

He had been fair enough, now that Captain Clarke looked back on it. No fault of his if fishermen and traders don't agree. Even if he did have a hard eye, even if he was too oily, it might just be the way with him. And Captain Clarke, remembering his own behavior, felt a bit of shame.

He should like to go on deck. He wondered whether Captain Brill was on the poop. He had been too quick to the man who rescued him. And even if they did drop him at Little Traverse, he was not a child—he could outwit the shore crew.

Stuffing his pride in his boot, Captain Clarke stepped through the companion to offer apologies to Captain Brill, to do it civilly as a ship master should.

When he climbed upon the deck the smart wind touched his nostril and set his blood tumbling. The ship was sliding in a heavy, roisterous sea, which curled over the bulwarks and splashed across decks. Captain Clarke gripped the rail and twisted his head. Aft at the wheel he made out the pointed black beard of Captain Brill, the flat, lashless face of Mr. Hoham, the mate, and the broad, tweed-fitted shoulders of the landsman. They were arguing.

Captain Clarke mounted the first step. He would face the three of them together, demand his pistols, thank them for putting him ashore where they wished, and then fight his way back to Gull Island. He winced at the self-imposed humiliation, but snorted when he thought of the odds he must face at Little Traverse.

His foot was on the second step. Three heads bobbed apart. The civilian was backing out.

"Kill him?" he was crying in a half-frightened, half-challenging voice. "Kill him in cold blood because he may have a sack of gold on him? You ask me to hold the gate open to murder? No, I answer you, and the quicker you put me ashore along with him the better I'll like it!"

He ran down from the poop-deck, looking back over his shoulder. Captain Clarke spread his arms and the enraged man plunged into them.

"You!" he cried. "You have heard it!"

His breath came in gasps.

"They are planning to shoot you, sir, thieves like you said—to rush you in the cabin!"

Captain Clarke backed away, his new compunction gone in a mutter.

"Then let's go below," he said, gritting his teeth. "I'm a particular man when it comes to disappointing callers. Quick, they'll see us if you stand there gawking and shivering. Come below"—he hooked the other's arm impatiently— "whose vitals is it they're carving up so proper, yours or mine?"

He pulled the landsman down the companion and closed the trap. Banging their shins, they pushed a way along the dark passage. Once in the cabin Captain Clarke turned up the lamp, bolted the door, and sat on the edge of the bunk.

"So your pretty skipper's inviting you to help yourself to my belt!"

"Exactly," the other whispered.

His voice shook. His face in the dim light showed up sickly.

"Cold blood, I call it!"

Captain Clark waved him silent.

"What's your name, if I may be so bold?"

"Trude," the fellow replied. "John Trude of Buffalo."

"Trude? Well, I never heard of no one by that name, fishing or trading. It ain't common, least out in this wilderness. Then, Mr. Trude, we'll get ready for the party. I never likes to disappoint callers. We'll be here. They don't intend to attack now?"

"After you're in the bunk tonight. They say they'll not make Little Traverse till morning. You're to sleep tonight. I'm to share your bunk with you—this was their plan. I'm to watch where you keep the sack of money. Ah, they know you have it! They heard about you at Mackinac!"

"Yes, and if you should find where I have the money, what then? Which of them is aching for a broken head? Which one will try to take it from me?"

"Captain Brill, dressed as a sailor, and a rag around his face. If you let it go without a fight, so much the better. If not, well—the mate said they could put your body through the porthole."

Captain Clarke stiffened.

"Have you a gun?" he asked.

"Aye!"

"Then put it away. This is a case of hands and toes, and a weepon is dangerous —dangerous, sir—in a fight. Right now, keep your ears open and a weather-eye on that door!"

IV

"THEY had plenty of chance before." Captain Clarke was talking half to himself, half to Mr. Trude.

He sat on the floor, while he stripped from his feet his heavy hide boots. Once barefooted, he breathed more easily.

"I'm ready now," he said. And then, reverting— "Why didn't they take the gold when I first came aboard?"

"I can answer that easy enough, sir," replied Mr. Trude.

He fidgeted on the edge of the bunk; his head touched the beam of the deck above.

"It was my own curiosity. They tried to get me out, but I kept on staying. I didn't understand, but I do now."

"It takes some men a long time to understand." Captain Clarke sighed. "Like them that predicts a rain when it comes in barrels and not a minute sooner."

Mr. Trude rocked uneasily. Captain Clarke measured his swing with the bed-slat. He spit on his hands again. He backed from the door.

"They got their heads closer together this minute than a pair of porcupines!" he grunted. "Adding you to their list of victims for coming to me with the story. They haven't the nerve to rush us by daylight—they'll wait for dark."

He was interrupted by a short, repeated rapping. He moved across the floor noiselessly. At the door he paused. Would he have it out now, or was it best to wait for dark? He knew the odds were great against him, but the passage was narrow—not more than one man at a time could squeeze through. Now, or night?

The rap sounded again, a more demanding drum.

"What do you want?" Captain Clarke asked in a contained voice.

"Captain's compliments, sir. He wants you to come to his cabin." It was the mate, Hoham. Captain Clarke recognized his voice.

"My compliments to Captain Brill," he snorted. "Tell him to get me there!"

And then he added—

"If he wants to make his peace with me, my ear's at the keyhole."

The man in the passage coughed. Trude, on his knees by a crack, listened.

"There's some one else with him," he whispered, and jerked his head toward the door. Captain Clarke tried the bed-slat at the other end; it was better that way. Heavier.

"If you're itchin' to get off," the mate called again, "the captain says come aft. He wants you now, very bad."

"Then if he wants me bad enough to get me, tell him to turn to with his crew and try it. I'm waiting—tell him that—waiting ready and respectful."

In the companionway there was a noise of confusion; then Captain Brill's voice, booming.

"Open that door or I'll smash it. Master's orders. Open!"

Captain Clarke lowered the bed-slat.

"Master's orders?" he repeated. "If that's it, I'll open."

He turned the knob. Without the door a bulky figure jumped back hurriedly out of sight; there were other sounds; a cuff, and an order to be silent. And then gingerly, with careful side glances and his forehead spotted with perspiration, Captain Brill stepped in.

"A fine treatment of my ship!" he grunted. "I pick you out of the combers and you go barricade your good-for-nothing skin in the cabin I lend you. What's that for treatment?"

Captain Clarke scowled and brought his bed-slat down in a practise blow that hit the floor between his own bare feet.

"Stand away easy!" he retorted when the noise had settled. "I know your sneaking plans. D'you think I'm to sea on a maiden voyage? I dare you or your filthy crew to lay a hand on me! Stories travel, sir, on fresh water and salt, and you can anchor me in fifty fathom, still somehow my men would know."

"What do you mean?" Captain Brill stood with his hands on his hips, looking from Trude to Captain Clarke and back.

"You know what I mean, sir! I mean that if ill comes to me and what I carry, that there's sixty fishermen and sailors—all man and a yard wide they are, too—that will sail their schooners while there's a rag on a spar and a breath in the sky, to find you. And you and your ship——"

He stopped. The colorless head of Hoham, the mate, edged into the light. Mr. Trude, sensing danger, had stepped aside toward the bunk. Captain Clarke, his eyes over shoulder, did not budge.

"Are you coming in, or skulking outside?" he asked finally.

The startled mate waited another second, hanging to the jambs, apparently embarrassed, and then swung into the cabin. At the same instant Captain Clarke slapped the door shut and pushed his broad shoulders against it.

He carried the bed-slat over his arm. His face went grimacing, as if trying to discover an expression suitable to the time. His temples were red, with veins like fingers across them, and his cheek and jaw, splotched with crisp, unshaven beard, turned blue and black in the light of the swinging lamp.

"Now we'll talk!" said Captain Clarke, "and it's pretty words and no other that I want from the both of you!"

Captain Brill moved uneasily, hands upon his hips, and his fingers kneading at the seams of his oilskin jacket. His head was thrust forward, with a curve to his neck, half-menacing, half-listening; and a grotesque shadow of his nose and pointed beard danced on the panels beside him.

"You are threatening me?" he began.

"With this?"

Captain Clarke swung the slat.

"No, not threatening. Just beating time to what I've got to say. Emphasis they calls it in document language."

"Then drop that club!"

Captain Brill bawled the command. He had no answer save the lash of waves against the side; the four men waited expectantly. Captain Clarke did not move the improvised weapon. Instead, he watched the master of the *Witch of the Wave*, with his eye cool for all his flushed temples.

The schooner lurched, so suddenly that Trude, the landsman, tumbled sidewise against the bunk, and the other three swayed with the motion. Up above there was a moment's turmoil, and Captain Brill, for an instant off his guard, suddenly remembered he was master of a ship. Head tipped back, he listened sharply for other sounds beyond the cabin panneling. The deck slid back again; there was an angry thrashing overhead, and sea-boots tapped hurriedly along the planks.

"Better get up there," he grumbled to Hoham. "That was a fresh squall. Leave these——"

He was interrupted by another heel of the schooner, and a cry from aloft.

"Stand aside!" Brill ordered Captain Clarke.

The fisherman laughed.

"I'm standing easy where I am," he retorted, "waiting, mister, to hear them words you came off deck to have with me."

Captain Brill slid his hand under his jacket. It reappeared with a brass-trimmed pistol, primed and ready, pointing at Captain Clarke.

"Interfere will you?" he cried. "I'll interfere you! The law don't monkey with folks that bother on ship."

His pistol went off with a roar that seemed to push out the sides of the cabin. Hoham shouted, and Trude cried out sternly for Captain Clarke to be on guard. But Captain Clarke had seen the motion, had gaged the instant, and doubled down. He was on his bare toes in a second, with his wooden bed-slat rapping left and right.

Hoham's hand slipped under his own oilskin; the slat came crashing down upon his elbow. He howled in pain, and with one hand grabbed the other arm, broken. Trude, who had stood, gaping with surprize and uncertainty, saw his advantage, and doubling up his legs, he leaped heavily upon the bent back of the mate.

That one's pistol, still charged, clattered to the floor. Captain Brill, shouting now, was beating the air with his own exploded gun. And Captain Clarke, making long sweeps with his slat, sputtered and growled as he aimed at the black beard of the man who had tried to shoot him.

The schooner lurched again, and the bed-slat, swinging at Captain Brill's head, was thrown off course by the motion. It met the lamp squarely, smashing through shade and chimney, killing the yellow flame, and throwing the cabin into gray splotches and black shadows. Mr. Trude, filled with fear by the crash of the glass and the all-consuming darkness, dropped his hold on Hoham.

The two went down to the floor together, their heads cracking, hands entangled as they searched for the fallen pistol. Trude found it. He stretched along the floor, and Hoham, as he felt the other's body lift, snatched through the dark and grabbed at the barrel.

"Don't shoot, Mr. Trude!" Captain Clarke warned above the uproar. "Just hold that rascal down until I've settled my bill with the skipper."

Captain Brill closed in under the beating slat and the two ship-masters gripped. They were thickly built men, with shoulders square with endurance, and they were upon each other like bears. The bed-slat went spinning, and the dead pistol dropped from the hands of its owner.

The *Witch of the Wave* was slipping through short, rough seas, reeling, tumbling, again standing upright. Hand to hand, neck to neck, the two captains fought it out, their weary feet easing to every tilt of the deck. In their own corner, Hoham with his broken arm, and Trude, unsteady and shaken, battled hopelessly, each with an eye on the dark, swirling figures in the center.

Some one was shouting at the door now; it opened, and Captain Clarke, hearing the click of the latch, kicked back, slamming it hard in the face of a frightened sailor. His backward motion brought Captain Brill at his waist.

Pushing forward, in his favor long knowledge of the cabin and the eccentric tumbling of his own ship, the sea-captain buffeted left and right, backed, charged and backed away again. Captain Clarke felt the wall behind him. He threw out his arms, fisherman fashion, and the two men fell into a violent clinch, each one with an elbow about the neck of the other, their right hands gripped as in some mystic ritual, breathing in each other's ears, swaying together, the fisherman's toes digging hard on top of the other man's feet.

Captain Clarke, still fighting the defensive, lurched with each nod of the striving vessel. He was panting, his mouth agape, his eyes staring. The black beard of Captain Brill sank into his tanned neck.

Again the door smashed open. A wet seaman stumbled through the dark, calling breathlessly that the schooner was in danger, that a new cat-squall was raking her. Captain Brill drew away for an instant. And Captain Clarke plunged a ragged fist forward.

His hand settled into the rough, bristling beard, and the hard, sharp line of jaw that underlay it. Captain Brill swayed. The man from on deck, talking excitedly to himself, blundered toward the door and made off down the passage, with green scare in his boot heels.

And with the next reel and plunge, Captain Clarke pressed forward again, swinging his hard right fist in a circle. The blow paid, Captain Brill wavered once, and then tumbled down to the floor like rotten canvas ripped loose from a gaff. Captain Clarke felt of him with his foot, not maliciously, but with the cautious assurance of victory.

"They's more coming," Mr. Trude suddenly let out from his corner.

Captain Clarke spun around. There was a patter of boots in the companion. Oilskin slickers rustled, figures crowded the entry. The frightened seaman had given the alarm, had told of violence in the master's quarters, of a fight in the dark.

"The mate's done!" Mr. Trude cried. "I've set on his chest till he's fainted."

"Then stand by for the others," Captain Clarke shouted. "There in the companion, rush—rush, 'em, now!"

He was at the first sailor with a spring in his bare feet, and the whole mass of heads and eyes disappeared at once, as if they had fallen overboard. Captain Clarke ran after them.

"Stay in the cabin," he shouted over his shoulder to Mr. Trude. "Keep them both down, on the floor! Now's the time to use that weepon. If they don't stay down, shoot!"

"Never mind!" Captain Brill was speaking painfully from the floor. "You've beat me this time. But it's a long wind don't blow itself out!"

Captain Clarke, with a deaf ear to the threat, was in the passage; his bare feet slapped the floor, his retrieved bed-slat rattled on the planks like a discharged musket. Up from the dark companion he chased the five seamen who had scuttled down at the bosun's heels, and out into the flying light of stormy dusk.

The men made the deck safely ahead of him. Not stopping to give fight, they charged forward like scared gulls. Heavy feet stumbled on the ring-bolts, and one man fell. He picked himself up, and the whole crew, confused and breathless, came to a halt at the forecastle hatch.

V

THE pounding night air touched Captain Clarke's nostril, smarted against it, and rekindled the energy that his battle in the dark had sapped. He flung a quick look at the wheel. Then up the poop ladder he went with his bare toes digging into the rungs.

An old sailor was leaning against the binnacle post, his tan face showing white through its weathering, his narrow lips tight, his sea-gray eyes fixed on the dark bow, now blurred with spray. The wind was whistling; the gaffs jumped with crazy contortions; the thick booms thundered; the blocks banged against iron-shod bulwarks; halyards screeched; lines snapped.

The edge of night trailed over the horizon. Clouds that ran low in a shallow sky whipped across the mast-heads. Far out beyond the careening breakers with their foamy, running tops, a narrow pencil of pink marked the west.

"What course?" Captain Clarke asked gruffly.

The watchful helmsman did not turn his head.

"Sou-by-sou-wes'," he replied.

"Hump!" Captain Clarke looked through the dark.

"What's that land?"

"Big Beaver Head," replied the seaman. He leaned heavily on the wheel, his eyes front, his arms steady.

"Round her!" ordered Captain Clarke. "Ease over a little. We don't need to trim—just ease over—starboard—so!"

"Orders to run to Little Traverse, sir!"

There was no surprize in the old man's voice. He had sailed too many seas, salt and sweet water, to find new surprize at his years. This was not his master. And until his own skipper spoke, he would hold the course.

"Those orders are done!" Captain Clarke spoke briskly. "I'm in command—ease over!"

The seaman did not move. Captain Clarke stood for a moment staring at the other man's bent, unyielding shoulders. Then, with a show of admiration, he slapped his leg. Backing off of the poop he caught the ladder just as a heavy sea broke across the main deck. The tall spars lay over. The starboard rail splashed through the top of each excited roller, the tips of the stout booms quivered like tuning tines, sending off a sound that barked and vibrated.

There was danger, Captain Clarke sensed; the men had deserted their posts. The ship was running wild, not a hand to man her except the leathery helmsman who remembered his part. But the wheel was only half of it. The crew, crouching about the forecastle companion-ladder, made a shapeless spot in the black dust that spread swiftly from the north. The air, heavy for an hour, chilled suddenly, and a slashing wind ran out of the west, with more confidence in every puff. Lake Michigan settled down to a night of it, to the terror of the great September gale.

Captain Clarke swung on the ladder with his arm hooked about an iron upright. The wash of a broken wave jigged crazily across the deck, and nipped at his bare feet, splashing up the calves of his legs. He ignored it. The schooner was in danger. He turned to the companionway and hurried down it toward the cabin.

It was thick dark there now, and he called out as he pushed open the door.

"Yes, sir!" Mr. Trude answered him.

"Captain Brill! I'm speaking to you—do you hear me?"

"Yes." The voice from the floor was half-hearted.

"Get on your feet, man, and up on deck. Your ship's in danger. She'll need to shift. Get up, I say! We'll drown our row till the storm's over!"

"Danger?" Captain Brill repeated the word as if his tongue did not know its meaning.

"Yes, danger! The September blow's come over. Will you get a move on now or not? Come up to the wheel! Word of honor—it's your ship, tend to your job and we won't touch you."

"You've killed him—ough! My arm!"

It was Mr. Hoham, the mate.

"Lie where you are!" warned Mr. Trude from the darkness of his corner.

Captain Brill groaned.

"Are you coming up?" Captain Clarke asked.

There was no reply. Captain Clarke reached down, steadying himself with the roll of the vessel. He found Brill's shoulder, and ran his hand around to the collar of the master's oilskin jacket.

"Out of it!" he ordered. "Stand up!"

"I'm hurt," Captain Brill pleaded. "My back's broke."

"You're coming up now—move there!" Captain Clarke insisted. "I'll not see this or any ship lost because its master's a pecking crow!"

Brill slid to unsteady knees. Captain Clarke boosted him. Once more they gripped each other as they had done before, in rage and battle, but now Captain Brill, too limp in the knees for a ship-master, hung on, as if for help, and Captain Clarke pulled him toward the door.

Once in the passage, wind from the deck slapped his own face and started the sluggish blood of Captain Brill.

"Hold on to me!" the victor warned. "Hold on and I'll get you aft—you pickerel-minded robber!"

Up the ladder they went and the door slammed shut after them. Aft at the wheel the two men blotched into one dark bulk, in the light reflected from the compass by the dim binnacle lamp. Their bodies moved together as the schooner wallowed in the trough of giant waves. The old helmsman did not turn. Curiosity, along with surprize and fear, had been washed overside in his years on ragged waters.

"Hold under Beaver Head!" ordered Captain Clarke. "Swing her in there, and you may ride it out. There's deep water, hills to windward and some safety."

"I'm — going — port of — Little Traverse!" insisted Captain Brill with straining lungs.

"And get broke up on them rocks that's thicker than whitefish off both points? No!"

Captain Clarke stamped.

"Order your man, order him like I tell you!"

Captain Brill echoed the command.

"Do like he says."

The old tillerman, still saying nothing, turned his wheel. Forward, the great sails flapped for a moment, and then began to spill wind, with a wild drumming of canvas. The *Witch of the Wave* heeled over, righted and grubbed her nose into the champing sea.

The door opened, was pulled shut by the wind, and opened again. A seaman, more inquisitive than his fellows, stuck in his head.

"All hands!" ordered Captain Clarke. "Take up them sheet-lines, steady her!"

"Do like he says!" added Captain Brill, and the seaman disappeared into the wet, howling night.

VI

THE *Witch of the Wave* swam uneasily. On watch at the wheel Captain Clarke buttressed the master against his own binnacle post, and gave short, low-spoken commands to the silent tillerman. Below in the cabin Mr. Trude had bundled the mate into his bunk. Under orders from the new master on deck, a frightened seaman had come to the cabin door with a lantern, and the lamp was kindled, throwing the room into jogging light and shadow. Only the disordered bedding and wet bootmarks on the floor, these and a small red spot on the door, remained of the battle.

Mr. Trude leaned over the form of Mr. Hoham, who sagged among the blankets.

"Lie still!" he ordered, and his voice was sharp with agitation. "I'll try to fix up that arm of yours."

"Hands away from me!" groaned Mr. Hoham. "Don't touch me! You're a murdering pirate."

Mr. Trude, with no more words, ripped a scarf from his own throat and slit the mate's sleeve. With fingers that he made firm to prevent their shaking, he bound the broken forearm into a crude splint.

Up on the poop-deck Captain Brill was standing more stanchly now, silently chewing his defeat. Captain Clarke at his elbow steadied him against the tumbling of the schooner, and watched the horizon. Below, along the main deck, a man with a flashing lantern staggered from place to place with short spurts of activity. The seas were higher; the wind went rumbling into the sails, drummed there, and emptied out, shrieking, to let in more wind.

The September gale hung by, ready to spill its fury. Black clouds perched on the mastheads. The spars, straining, leaned down, and the deck tilted mercilessly, rose and fell, slid and stood level. Waves tumbled overside and made white suds in the lee scuppers. A cask rattled across the deck, banging on the hatch covers with a hollow sound, that was sharper than the wind and the seas.

"Ease her off a bit," ordered Captain Clarke.

Captain Brill growled; recovered from his choking, but knuckling under still in the presence of the man who had beaten him.

"Was you speaking to me, sir?" Captain Clarke demanded.

"I was that! I was saying that you would pay for this when we get ashore."

"There's many things can happen before then," remarked Captain Clarke enigmatically, and then added: "It's a pretty story you'll have to tell! Picked me up—schemed to rob me—pushing my body through a porthole, you was—and then beat in a fair fight in your own cabin!

"It's I will do the talking if I have a mind to, sir, and it's I that has the most talk coming. And speaking of fair play, where's my pistols? I didn't take much of a fancy to the one you had in the cabin."

Captain Brill sagged forward sullenly.

"Where are they?" Captain Clarke repeated.

"Under my chart case. I'll get them for you."

"Stand still!" Captain Clarke cried. "I'll thank you for staying where you are!

"Hold this course!" he added. "I'm going forward."

He rummaged in the drawer under the charts; then, lifting his damp jacket, he thrust the brass-mounted pistols into his belt.

He leaned hard upon the door of the wheel-house, pitting his own strength against the haranguing gale. The wind held firm as a steel catch till the ship rolled over, and he was out in a jiffy, with the door banging shut upon his heels. He hung to the ladder, his elbow hitched about the iron rungs, until a momentary calm permitted him to drop to the sloping deck.

Slowly, painfully, gaging each step, hanging to ring-bolts and spikes, easing himself forward hand over hand, he approached the forecastle hatch. There a spray-clouded lantern made a dim halo in the night, where some one held it in the shelter of the hood. Great seas washed over, striking the breath out of him. The deck shook him, but he held.

Once in the hatch, he found the bosun, with a group of mumbling sailors. They backed away when they made out the squat figure of Captain Clarke.

"Bosun!" he cried.

"Aye, sir!"

"Captain Brill's at the wheel," Captain Clarke informed him. "We're running under Beaver Head. Where's your watch? All hands!'

The bosun sulked.

"Out with ye!" Captain Clarke cried.

His harsh yell cut at the insurgent men like a swinging rope, and they leaped tardily to action.

"Batten up that main hatch! Make that extra boom fast—she's breaking up the ship."

Back and forth across the dizzy deck bosun and seamen labored, rolled over, held for their lives to ring-bolts or dangled at the ends of whipping lines, while seas pounded down on them and the voice of Captain Clarke boomed through the gale.

The night was long in passing. At four o'clock when the watch should have changed, the worn mainsheet ripped from her gaff with a thunder as of many guns and flapped out across the tumbling water. Drenched seamen, reckless of life in the danger of lost cloth, labored in milky water that churned through the scuppers, retrieving the sail. The dancing gaff came down, the mainsheet once more arose aloft to do uncertain duty.

Dawn flapped on the skirts of a stinging wind, gray as a lifeless thing, wan and worn. The bluff headlands of Beaver Island loomed out of the thin light. The wind slackened. Cross currents of air swept, troubled, behind the land. The *Witch of the Wave* trembled, rolled and pawed through the breakers, as if her hull were frightened in her doubtful security. The seas, cross-running, met as they rounded the point, lifted against each other, and retreated, frothing and grumbling toward the shore.

The ship lay under the land till the day was full. Mr. Trude, leaving the injured mate in the cabin, locked the door and came on deck. Captain Clarke, with red, sleepless eyes, leaned on the rail, looking down on the disordered deck, where grumbling seamen were setting things to rights. Hawsers creaked through the hawse-holes, tugging at dragging anchors. All canvas was down except a spanker, which flapped over the stern, holding the nose of the schooner up into the wind.

"Morning!" Captain Clarke looked up sleepily.

"Where are we?" Mr. Trude asked in a thick, tired voice.

"Beaver Head—we'll lie her out here."

The door of the captain's cabin opened. Captain Brill, with a cut on his cheek and his beard matted below it, his eyes circled with dark rings, stepped uncomfortably to the deck.

"May I have a word with you?" he asked.

Captain Clarke grunted.

"I want to to come to terms."

"Ho! Terms, is it?" cried Captain Clarke. "Terms? First you go sneaking with your mate to murder—ugh! Then you fight and I beat you. Like a squaw you were, whimpering and begging down there. And I save your ship for you, and give you safe anchorage, and I'm man enough to let you walk your own poop instead of waiting for the arresting officers in the chain locker where you belong! And you talk terms? Ho!"

He stopped for want of breath.

Captain Brill swung around with a sign of his first independence.

"Very well, then. If you won't, you won't," he cut in. "But you'll not take this crew to any of your fisherman's islands."

"I'll not?"

"I'm telling you, you'll not. These men won't go to Gull Island!"

He waved his arm at two of the sailors, who stole a breath of rest under the lee side of the deck-house.

"Won't go?"

"No more'n you'd go to a trading-post. They've heard of your fishing-fleet and the way it handles traders who come there. They won't man ship there, that's all. For all the guns in your pocket! They'd rather face guns than your fishers. I was going to talk terms——"

"What are your terms?" Mr. Trude interrupted.

"I'll run past Gull Island," Captain Brill offered submissively, "and drop the both of you off in the dory. But in the meantime, give me command of my own ship."

Captain Clarke was silent. Then he laughed.

"A fine old woman you are, to be a ship captain!" he cried. "Begging for command on your own deck! Yes—I've saved your schooner for you, take her! And put me ashore on the beach at Gull."

VII

CAPTAIN BRILL pulled up his collar, and his shoulders were squarer. He looked more a man now, less a whimpering coward. Command, even obtained dishonorably, puts iron in a man's spine. Captain Clarke watched him, with disdain and weary amusement in his eyes.

"It's slacking," he announced.

"Yes."

Captain Brill looked at the sky, the drumming lake, and the black lines of pines atop Big Beaver.

"This blow'll die fast. By the time you run the length of the island—thirteen miles—it will be fair sailing."

"Yes." Captain Brill answered shortly turning his back.

He called the bosun, who mounted the poop sheepishly, as if ashamed for his master and pitying himself. He was a lean, swarthy fellow, with a show of Indian under the olive tan of his cheeks, and an air of contempt in the tilt of his head.

"Make sail," ordered the captain, "and send Gusset to the wheel."

The bosun shuffled across the swaying deck and into the forecastle companion. Men, routed out, came up grumbling. The booms sagged, and the jiggling gaffs started on their slow journey aloft with half a dozen men tugging out of time and no chanty to help the work along. The old wheelman was relieved. He walked below slowly, blowing his fingers, without a glance toward the rail where stood his two masters.

The *Witch of the Wave* nosed sulkily around the coast of Beaver Island, nodding into cross currents of the dying storm, shying upon broken rollers, till the point of land at the northern tip ran down, sandy and bare, to uneasy water.

Captain Brill stood by the wheel, silent now, his eyes half-closed, his high nose sniffing. Captain Clarke, his bare feet rigged once more in his boots, braced his back against the side of the life raft. Mr. Trude watched beside him. The schooner tacked northward, toward the high, rocky coast of Gull Island.

She had left Big Beaver behind and was rounding the head of Garden Island, with the fisherman's port still twenty miles off the starboard bow. Suddenly abaft her beam, two miles across the water, there hove into sight from the Garden Island bay a small, two-masted vessel. Her white canvas shone in the sharp morning light that trailed the storm, her sticks lay over with the booms close along the water, eating wind.

Captain Brill sighted her first, and at the same instant the lookout cried from his post in the bow. Captain Clarke got to his feet.

The slender craft was out in the deep water almost before the alarm was sounded; she set a course to carry her across the bows of the *Witch of the Wave*.

"Know that ship?" Captain Brill cried down from the poop, forgetting for a second his lost security.

"She's not of these waters."

Captain Clarke leaned over the rail. Idle seamen crowded near him. He moved along; it wouldn't do, letting these fellows get too near. There still might be trouble.

"Go below, Mr. Trude," he said, in an enormous voice. The nearest seaman shied and found duty elsewhere. "See if Mr. Hoham wants anything. Then lock him in again and hurry back."

Captain Brill, whose eyes still watched the coming craft, looked away quickly and not without malice, and he thought of his own second in command, injured and a prisoner below.

"He's growling and swearing," reported Mr. Trude as he climbed back. "Seems to be stronger."

Captain Brill listened with a black line between his eyes. The fore-and-after was coming along fast. He could see men on her decks now, twenty or more—a larger crew than a craft of that size would be apt to carry.

"Is that a fishing-boat?" He spoke with a sandy scratch in his voice, as if the words annoyed him.

"It is not!" Captain Clarke answered quickly. "More'n likely she's a trader."

Captain Brill walked nervously along the rail, shielded his eyes and took a short glance seaward.

"I'm going to ease off this course," he said hurriedly. "I have no liking for her. You're willing?"

He was already on his way to the wheelhouse. Captain Clarke waited, not wanting to show relief.

"Ease off, then," he agreed. "I have no mind to let them board us myself. They have the look of your thieving shoremen.

Off—another point—that will give them a run for it. See? They're changing course, they're following."

Brill, the humbled, and Clark, the victor unconsciously allied against a common, unknown foe. For each sensed danger in the swift-sailing vessel that was drawing closer, only a mile off now, on the starboard bow.

"She's fast!" Mr. Trude commented. "Seems to be gaining."

Captain Clarke compressed his lips and rubbed his prickly chin with his short fingers. Captain Brill, after a hurried consultation with the wheelman, walked the poop with short, catlike turns. The fisherman watched him. Captain Brill was worried; there was no doubt of it. But he himself was worried. What if these, too, were traders, intent upon his gold, and with the memory of ill-use at the hands of his own men urging them on? What would Brill do then? A crafty rascal, this ship-master, with his own defeat still stinging him like a brine-soaked lash. But Brill was afraid too—that made Captain Clarke pause, rub his chin and think again.

"Mr. Trude, please step here!" he ordered shortly.

Trude hurried over.

"You have a pistol?"

"Yes, sir. My own, and the one I got from the mate. They're here——"

"Never mind showing them, but hold them ready. That little hooker out there will overtake us in an hour, or I'm mistaken. Then, well, be ready for anything the clouds drop down on us."

He chewed his last words into silence, for he saw Brill's ears in his direction. The seamen were crowded about the ladder now, awaiting the word of their officer, their faith in his strength badly shaken.

The two-master drove closer. Men were signaling from her deck. Captain Brill strode uneasily. He was mumbling to himself. Of a sudden he turned on Captain Clarke.

"I want words with you!" he said bruskly. "I'll tell you this—you had me down awhile ago, but I didn't tell all I knew then. It was in the cabin down there that I have all the arms on the ship. There's a sliding panel above the berth. I'm the only one who knows it aboard, I never even trusted my mate. If I had, you'd be locked below before this, for he'd have had the guns out and the crew armed two hours ago.

"That ship," he pointed toward the approaching craft, "may or may not be a trading vessel. But she's no friend of mine, or of yours either. Let me go to the cabin—come along if you want—and we'll have pistols and powder instead of naked hands. Yes, and a sword or two for those of us who can use them!"

Captain Clark felt the insinuation—he, a poor fisherman, was not expected to handle a blade. But his eyes closed to slits as he answered.

"Not a sword maybe, but, sir, I'm plenty proficient with a bed-slat, as there's some might tell!"

Brill swallowed his own retort. Enemies aboard are twice as dangerous as enemies overside. He went down to the companion and the two men unlocked the cabin where Mr. Hoham lay, grunting and swearing at his broken arm. Captain Brill with no ceremony pushed back a panel. Into view slid a case of pistols. These and powder-horns, a pair of swords, and a cluster of cutlasses hung upon a hook.

"I'll pass out the arms, and the orders too!" Captain Clarke spoke quietly. He handed the pistols and horns to Mr. Trude. "Take the swords," he addressed Brill. "I'll carry the knives. They're unhandy things in fingers behind your back."

The hooker had made good time while they were below. She was overhauling fast. Calling the crew, which waited amidships about the bosun, Captain Clarke doled out the cutlasses. The pistols Mr. Trude dropped to the deck. Under the fisherman's direction he set to work priming and loading.

"There's at least twenty men aboard her!" Captain Brill suddenly shouted. "Down!" he added, and the same instant a hot bullet whanged overhead, cutting a hole through the mainsheet.

VIII

THE helm disobeyed the signal to halt. The frightened crew spread out along the side, on their knees behind the gunwale. Captain Clarke flung himself on the poop-deck with Mr. Trude by his side; at his heels Captain Brill slouched under the weight of two swords, his face so pale that the clot of blood looked like ink on paper.

A second bullet whistled over. Mr. Trude was for answering it, but Captain Clarke shook his head impatiently. The smaller vessel was running alongside now, not fifty fathoms off. Its own crew had taken to the insufficient shelter of its undecked sides.

About the wheel huddled a small group of men. One of them was halloing, but a clamorous wind shook his words to pieces. Captain Clarke snorted and looked to his pistol. He glanced at the other guns, laid out on the deck beside him. Mr. Trude was working fast.

She had gained on the *Witch of the Wave*, this small, swift craft that menaced the bulkier schooner; she was sidling across her bows. Gusset, the helmsman, making himself small behind the binnacle post, allowed the wheel to flop dangerously.

"*Witch of the Wave!*" cried a voice on the other vessel, a voice that struck Captain Clarke unpleasantly, as if once he had heard it under unhappy circumstances.

"They'll not set a boot on our deck," he growled to himself, and he aimed hastily at the red stocking wind-vane on the main mast. The ball left his pistol with a full roar. The crimson cloth floated away and yellow chips followed it.

The crew of the *Witch of the Wave*, huddled behind the stout oak bulwarks, gripped brutal knives and waited. The little hooker, in spite of the warning shot, edged nearer. Captain Clarke, flat on the poop now, fingered the fresh pistol he had taken up.

Here was new danger; whose danger it was he did not know; except that this unknown, overhauling ship seemed bent on doing mischief to some one. He forgot all old perils. He forgot Captain Brill, squatting behind him. He did not notice the black-faced bosun crawling across the deck in his rear. He even ignored Mr. Trude, leaning forward in the shelter of the life raft, snapping his teeth as he pushed the powder home and set the cap in the pistol Captain Clarke had fired.

Trouble started from behind. The air hissed, as if a knife were slicing through it. Captain Clarke turned around swiftly. The bosun's arm was swinging up; his cutlass fell heavily, missing the fisherman's head, slicing at his ear. Captain Clarke felt a sharp pain shoot through his body. He heard a shout from Mr. Trude, and as he rolled to his face he fired his pistol backward. He heard his voice echoed by Captain Brill, first in a cry of pain; then rage, and a rush of angry words. Captain Clarke reeled to his feet. He saw Brill, with his left shoulder sagging, tumble Mr. Trude down the ladder with his other good arm.

Gusset the helmsman, had taken up the call. A fat sailor with ear-rings scuttled for the ladder, waving his cutlass. The deck shook with hubbub. Captain Clarke took two steps toward the disarranged stack of firearms. But the lean bosun was upon him, blade in hand, and the fisherman dropped as the same broad cutlass whipped across his head a second time.

Captain Brill shouted an order. The negligent Gusset doubled back to his job. The *Witch of the Wave* swung over to starboard, not three boat lengths away from the hooker that came head on toward her tipsy side. She would run the smaller craft down—there was no helping it—and already men had leaped into sight upon the other deck.

The seas rang with cries, sharp commands, then pistol shots from both vessels. Captain Clarke felt a dull burn in his thigh and his leg loosened. He dropped to the deck. As if surprized, he touched his hand to his woolen breeches and looked, unbelieving, at the blood upon it.

The gaff of the main sail of the hooker jammed across the bow of the *Witch of the Wave*. The schooner lifted her nose and crunched through the side of the little vessel. A great shock traveled from bow to stern; the *Witch of the Wave* teetered, lay over and grated without mercy the battered wreck of the boat she had run down.

The violent crash tossed Captain Clarke across the poop and down the main deck; he sprawled there, roaring. Mr. Trude was on his feet now, and grappling with a sailor who charged him with lifted knife. A head popped overside, and another. The blue uniform of an American soldier, with his piece and bayonet, poised a second on the bulwarks.

Captain Clarke caught a quick sight of heads in the water, of wreckage and swimming men; he heard voices, drumming out orders, shouting commands, crying with fear, anger and agony.

He saw the face of the bosun, grinning now, close by, and he remembered his own brass-mounted pistols, held in his pocket for emergency. He fired, and the bosun's face stopped grinning.

A man stepped on him. Others were coming overside. Men were fighting on the main deck and the poop-ladder.

"Take that!" he heard Mr. Trude say calmly through the uproar, and a pistol discharged close by.

The wheel banged idly. Captain Brill, standing behind it, held one hand overhead, while the other hung loose beside him. An officer faced him—an officer in the uniform of the Government. Who was it? Captain Clarke sat up.

"Lieutenant McHenry!" he called, and the young, blond commandant of Fort Mackinac whirled toward him quickly.

"You?" he cried.

IX

THE army lieutenant ran across the deck, tilting awkwardly against the heave of the vessel, his sword interfering with his legs.

"What's this?" he demanded.

He boosted the bulky fisherman up.

"Why are you here, on this ship?" he repeated. "I thought you were going to Gull Island?"

"Wrecked," Captain Clarke explained. "Picked up by this crew—tried to get my belt—had to whip 'em, me and my friend there." He nodded toward Mr. Trude.

"Here!" Lieutenant McHenry called other men, soldiers. "Help this gentleman—and that one there. Take the wheel, Johnson," he ordered a heavy, red-faced fellow, a sailor apparently, not in uniform. "Corporal Shayne, get four or five men and take charge of that door up front where the sailors went in. Keep them there."

Captain Clarke rolled up his left breeches' leg—it was a long wound but not deep. It had stopped bleeding already. He looked back at the poop. The battle had passed, almost more rapidly than the attack at his back had begun.

Soldiers bustled all about, their finery spoiled by their ducking. Some of their guns, ruined by water, they swung by the muzzles, holding them like clubs. Of the *Witch of the Wave* crew only two remained in sight; Captain Brill in a sick heap beside the wheel, and the bosun rolling lifeless with each heave of the dirty deck.

McHenry was forward, then aft in a jiffy. He struck his head over the poop deck, his sword rattled against the ladder; he was down again, forward and back. Two of his guard were helping wet men overside—a pair of sailors with earrings and matted hair, and three others, older fellows, in the black and gray of cities and civilization.

On deck the three shore men walked straight toward Captain Brill. The shipmaster lifted his head, defiantly Captain Clarke could see. One of the strangers got down on his knees and iron clanked. Lieutenant McHenry came back excitedly

"He's the one!" he exclaimed. "Brill of French River—the cleverest smuggler on the Canadian frontier. Nothing he'd stop at——"

"Smuggler?" Captain Clarke scoffed. "Murderer, you mean. For sticking his guests, he was, through the porthole."

"Murder as soon as clap his hands!"

Lieutenant McHenry pointed to the men in shore clothes.

"They came along two hours after you left—customs agents, from Detroit and Ottawa. If you had waited there when I asked you—well, no matter! This scamp here lets out his ship. Understand? Carries powder and ball and whisky for the Indians. Right here under your boot the hold is full. He takes it across to Little Traverse." Captain Clarke grunted.

"In cahoots with the traders?" he asked.

"Dishonest traders. They can get more skins for contraband than for honest money."

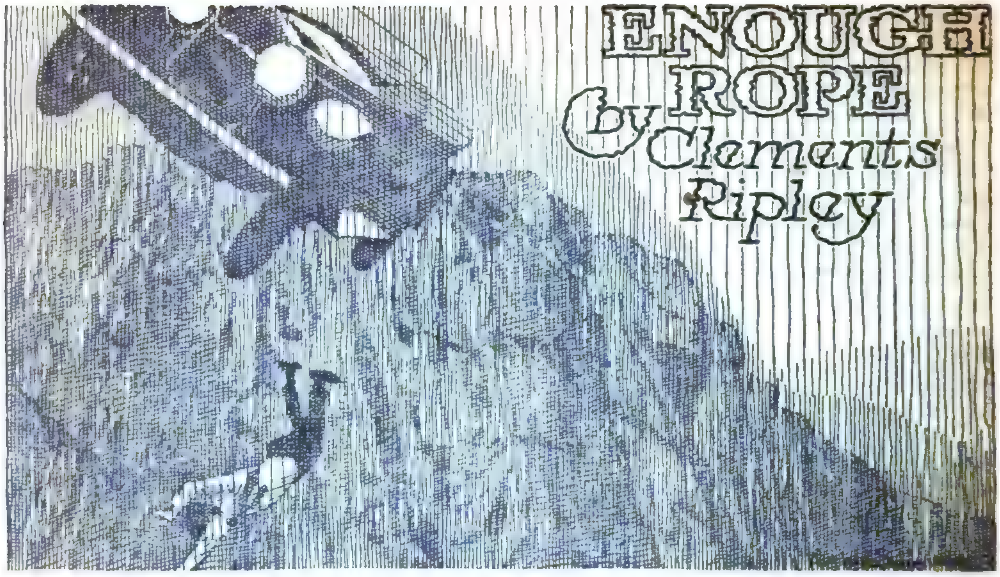
Captain Clarke, as mannerly as he knew how, allowed the officer to give him an arm. A soldier helped him on the other side.

"Let's get to that wheel," McHenry said. "We'll transport this crew straight back to the guard-room at Fort Mackinac."

Captain Clarke, propped on a stool in front of the binnacle, shifted over the helm of the *Witch of the Wave*. Her sails filled, the tall masts leaned over. Two sailors made fast the prow of the crippled hooker to the taffrail.

"Take command!" Lieutenant McHenry directed. "You sail the ship. I'm no sailor. I'm a fighting man."

"Yes, you're a fighting man—see that by your uniform. But I ask you civil—was you ever handy with a bed-slat?"



ENOUGH ROPE

by Clements Ripley

Author of "Ain't That Our Luck," "According to the Evidence," etc.

IT HAD been a nasty accident. Doc Piper straightened wearily from his examination of the huddled heap that had been Pomeroy Fairfield, wiped his hands mechanically on the seat of his riding-breeches, and looked curiously at the twisted wreck of the car. He shook his grizzled head.

"Hm, dear me," he mused. "Mighty sad——"

His glance traveled up the slope to the road, fifty feet above, whence the inevitable knot of onlookers stared down at the wreck with a sort of melancholy satisfaction. He shook his head again, his weazened face twisted in a frown of puzzlement.

"Right sad," he muttered. "Curious, too. Mighty curious."

"Is he dead sure enough, doc?" some one questioned from above.

"My goodness, yes. All smashed up."

He slid his instrument case back into his saddle-bags, threw them over his shoulder and clambered up to the road.

"Anybody know how it happened?" he demanded.

A dozen volunteers made haste to point out the tracks the car had made. They led straight to the edge of the road and over, without a sign of a skid.

"Most seems like he done it on purpose," suggested one of the group.

"Might be there was something wrong with his steering gear," contributed another, an explanation which seemed to take with the crowd.

"Humph, maybe," agreed Doc Piper as he climbed stiffly into the car that was to take him back to town. "Let's go, Jim."

"Mighty sad," he mused, as the car gathered headway. "A body couldn't help liking 'Pom' Fairfield."

"That's right," agreed the driver. "There wasn't a nicer feller in the county, or one that would go further to do a friend a good turn."

"They do say, though, that he was bootlegging," he added after a pause.

"Maybe," agreed the little doctor indifferently.

"His friends are, that's sure," persisted the driver. "Them two at the drug-store have been at it for two years. Looks like Pom would be in it too, him being so thick with them."

"Pom was always easy going," said Doc Piper. "They might have got him into it, of course. But when you come down to it, there's worse things than bootlegging. The worst part about it is the company you keep."

The driver nodded assent.

"You said a mouthful that time, doc," he informed him. "There couldn't be much worse company than Wales and Matlack."

"Well, I don't know. There is a kind of

smooth way about Matlack that I ain't crazy about. Looks to me like Wales was just sort of a hired man to him in spite of their being partners."

"I never could see what Pom saw in them."

"Nor me," agreed the little doctor. "Now Nelson was different. He was more like Pom—a little bit wild maybe, but a nice, clean-cut boy. Funny how things turn out. Only last year those four were always around together, and now Nelson's dead—murdered, and here Pom's dead, too."

"Leaving Wales and Matlack," commented the driver. "Curious how the good ones get took off and leave the scum. Who you reckon shot Nelson, doc?"

"Dear me, I wisht I knew. I don't suppose they'll ever find out. Seems right sad. Nice boys, both of 'em."

The driver cleared his throat huskily.

"I know," he said sadly. "Used to bird-hunt with both of 'em, 'specially Pom. I never see a better hand to hunt, and the way he could handle a dog—gosh, you'd have thought they talked the same language. Seemed like his dogs would rather get a little petting from him than a square meal."

"My goodness, yes. Crazy about 'em, he was, too," reminisced Doc Piper. "I recollect the time he cleaned up on Lafe Dugan for tying a can to a pup's tail. Gave him the trimming of his life, and Lafe three times his size. Pom wasn't more than fourteen then, but it seems like it was only last week."

The driver grinned at the recollection.

"That was Pom all over," he agreed. "He never could stand to see anything abused. Where can I leave you, doc?"

"At the house, if you're going by that way. Dear, dear! I'm sorry for Mrs. Fairfield—mighty sorry."

"Mighty hard on her," agreed the driver sympathetically. "Pom wasn't much of a hand to save up anything either. I hope he had life insurance."

"Dear me, yes, I hope so," said the little doctor as the machine slowed in front of his little frame house. "Hard on her any way you put it, poor lady."

He opened the door as the car stopped and climbed stiffly from the seat.

"Light and rest, Jim?" he suggested with the inevitable formula of the Southwest, and as the driver shook his head, "Well, thanks for the lift."

"Don't mention it."

The car slid away, and Doc Piper turned up the path to his front door, his weariness settling back on him like a black cloud.

HE HAD every right to be tired, he reflected as he trailed his rusty spurs through the dust. He had ridden thirty-five sun-baked miles since dawn, stopping at one ranch to set a broken collar bone and at another to assist a little Mexican into the world. He had gone ten miles out of his way to descend like a wolf on the fold on the slovenly wife of a Dry Fork nester and her under-nourished brood, had thrown open the windows of her reeking kitchen, hurled the greasy contents of her frying pan out of the back door and had then and there given a cooking lesson, to the accompaniment of strange double-jointed oaths of his own devising.

After he had left, in a final burst of invective, a ten-dollar gold piece had been discovered on the table where his battered hat had lain.

He had just reached home and unsaddled Theodore, so called for his rough-riding qualities, when he was called to the scene of Pomeroy Fairfield's accident.

Now he was tired, dog-tired, and the thought of his armchair was the one thought in the world worth thinking.

"And by the pants of Julius Cæsar," growled Doc Piper as he mounted his rickety front steps, "If any dod-rotted hammerhead thinks he's got a bellyache this afternoon he can keep it over until tomorrow."

He flung open the door. There was his armchair, and in it was Margie McCrimmon, age ten, and in her arms was a setter puppy.

"He's hurt," announced Margie without preamble.

Without a moment's hesitation the little doctor hurled his battered hat into one corner, his saddle-bags into another, and gathered the little dog into his arms.

His visitor gave a great sigh of relief and smoothed her small skirt.

"What seemed to be the trouble?" he inquired gravely.

He bent to touch a forefoot that hung limp and the puppy gave a sudden yelp.

"Steady, little feller," he soothed, while Margie clasped her chubby hands and drew her breath sharply between her teeth.

"It's his leg," she moaned, her eyes wide with tears, "his poor little hurt leg."

"Of course, of course," said Doc Piper gently. "Kind of dumb-headed of me not to see if before."

Very gently he set the puppy down on the table. His wrinkled brown hand ran over the leg with expert tenderness, Margie watching the while, her blue eyes wide with anxiety.

"Looks like it was fractured," he announced at length, running his hand through his grizzled hair.

A great tear slid down her round cheek and splashed on the table.

"O-oh," she moaned, "it sounds awful. Please, doctor, can't you do something to fix it?"

Doc Piper drew himself up indignantly.

"Dad-blame it, Margie," he growled, "What kind of a doctor do you think I am, anyway? The idea of suggesting that I couldn't set a simple fracture. Of course I can fix it, doggone it. You ought to be ashamed."

Being a child she did precisely what any other child in three counties would have done. She took the growl for exactly what it was worth. Children have an insight into these things, and no child had ever had occasion to fear a growl from Doc Piper. The growl was an integral part of him, like the evil tasting medicines and the peppermint lozenges that followed them.

"I think you're the best doctor in the world," she assured him with shy earnestness.

He scowled ferociously.

"Here," he directed bruskly, "help me get this table cleared off. A body'd think I was getting sloppy the way things get left around. That's right. Dump 'em on the floor. Dod-blast it, how am I goin' to work unless I can get some elbow room?

"Reach me the instrument case in that saddle-pocket in the corner. Fine.

"So-o now, little feller," he soothed as he took hold of the leg. "So-o, now."

There was a shrill, prolonged yelp of pain. From where Margie stood, her chubby hands clenched in an agony of sympathy there came a stifled sob.

"Hurts pretty bad, I guess," said the little doctor ruefully. "Still, it won't last long."

"O-oh, it's awful. I s'pose it's all for the best, but, doctor, I—I kind of thought there was something you gave people to put them to sleep while you were hurting them."

"By the Great Whoopenticket, of course there is," he shouted suddenly. "Dern me, blamed if I'm not getting so dad-burned old I'm getting feeble-minded. Now how," he appealed to her, "could I have been so chuckle-headed as to forget that?"

And so, with muttered invective against his own stupidity he gravely anesthetized the puppy, with minute attention to detail, and set and bound the leg.

"And now," he questioned as he finished and the puppy began to stir uneasily as he came out of the anesthetic, "how came he to break it?"

"He was playing in the road," she informed him, "and an automobile ran right over him. And the worst of it was, doctor—" her eyes widened with the enormity of it—"they never stopped at all. They just went right on."

"Humph," snorted Doc Piper, "a man must be pretty full of poison meanness to do a thing like that. Nobody from around here I'll bet."

"But it was. It was Mr. Pomeroy Fairfield."

The little doctor's lean hand, half-way to the pocket where he kept his tobacco, stopped in mid-air.

"Pomeroy Fairfield? Sure, Margie?" he questioned.

She stared at him, taken aback at the sudden change in his tone.

"Absolutely sure, Margie?" he repeated.

"Oh, yes, doctor. I saw him just as plain as could be, and it was his car, with the silver wings on the front."

"Dear me. Doesn't seem possible. About what time was it?"

She considered, twisting her chubby face into a frown in the effort of recollection.

"I don't know," she told him at length. "We came to you pretty soon afterward, and we waited ever so long for you to come back. And his little leg hurt so, and he cried so pitifully," she added, her blue eyes filling again as she recalled it.

"But, Margie, Mr. Fairfield would have stopped," insisted the doctor. "Are you sure?"

"He wasn't driving," she told him, "but it was him all right. That Mr. Wales from the drug-store was driving, and Mr. Matlack was in the car too. They were all three on the front seat."

"And I know Mr. Fairfield saw my puppy," she went on, half in tears, "because he was looking straight ahead. I hate him."

"Margie," he told her seriously, "it won't do to hate Mr. Fairfield any more. Just after he ran over your puppy he had a bad accident. We mustn't think about hating him any more.

"Now you run along," he went on. "The puppy will be all right. You just keep him quiet and bring him back to me in a day or two."

Unquestioning, she obeyed him, but at the door she paused for an instant, dug into a diminutive pocket and gravely produced a nickel, which she handed him.

"That's for fixing my puppy's leg," she told him primly.

He thanked her with intense seriousness as he slipped it into his pocket.

"Saves me the trouble of sending a bill," he told her gratefully.

THE door closed behind her. Doc Piper gave a sigh of pure weariness and clanked his rusty spurs across the room to the armchair, where he swung his bow legs to the table, and began an abortive attempt to doze off.

For fifteen minutes he fidgeted uneasily. There was an idea which had been forming in the back of his mind ever since Margie and her puppy had left. It was a wild idea, he told himself, a crazy idea. It had no reasonable foundation, and nobody but a doddering, half-baked old fool would entertain it for an instant.

"Dad-blame me," he muttered. "I'd ought to have better sense at my time of life. Humph!"

With a snort of disgust he closed his eyes again, and utterly cast out and abolished the idea from his mind, whereupon it returned and played with his rest as a cat plays with a mouse.

At length he formed a plan for its destruction, a crafty plan, worthy of a master mind.

"Give it rope to hang itself," he soliloquised. "That's the ticket."

Settling himself comfortably he fumbled for his tobacco and rolled a brown-paper cigaret.

"Now, y'old fool," he addressed himself grimly, "let's have it. First off, suppose Pom Fairfield was murdered, who did it?

"Matlack and Wales," he answered his own question. "Now why?"

"Well, they were the last people seen with him. That's good moving-picture evidence that they killed him, ain't it?

He chuckled grimly. He was beginning to enjoy the rout of this fool idea that bothered him.

"All right," he went on. "What did they kill him for?

"Well, there are three main reasons for murder. Robbery? Not hardly. Pom didn't have anything they'd want. Nothing on the body was touched. Sudden anger? Wales and Matlack ain't that kind. Takes a kind of bull-headed, heedless man to do that.

"All right," he continued, "that leaves fear.

"Fear," he repeated slowly. "Now fear of what? Something Pom knew about 'em? Bootlegging?

"Not important enough to kill a man for," he decided.

He leaned back and closed his eyes, his mind intent on the problem. It would have to be a pretty serious thing to make those two murder Pom Fairfield. Swiftly he ran over what he knew of them. They had all three lived in the county for over ten years. They had always been together, they and poor Nelson who had been shot last year.

"Nelson!" He pounced on the word. "Now who killed Nelson?

"Suppose," he mused, "suppose Matlack and Wales killed Nelson for some reason—and I wouldn't put it beyond what little I know of those two—and Pom found it out. They'd want to get him out of the way——"

He broke off disgustedly.

"Humph," he snorted. "What reason on earth have I got for thinking anybody killed Pom? Just because a man has a motor accident— And then Margie McCrimmon comes in with a little yarn about Pom, and darned if I ain't sap-head enough to make me a whole saddle-blanket out of it. It's plumb out of sense."

He settled himself determinedly to doze off again, but it was no use.

"Got to give that fool notion a run for it's money," he decided. "Suppose they did kill Pom, and threw him and his car over the cliff for a blind, they'd want to kill him some way that wouldn't leave a mark. They might hit him on the head with something and trust to luck the body'd be so smashed up that it wouldn't be noticed, but the natural thing would be poison—for a feller that runs a drug-store."

Pivoting suddenly on the base of his spine, he swung his feet to the floor.

"Here," he remarked grimly, "goes William H. Piper, M. D., on his way to make a gol-darned idiot of himself."

Snatching his battered felt hat from the corner where he had thrown it, he mashed it on to his head with both hands and clanked moodily out of the door and down the little town's single street.

AT THE far end of the Boston Store Cal Houseman, who combined the functions of storekeeper and undertaker bustled about with a cheerfulness with which he strove in vain. Funerals were rather rare events in the community and Cal, who had a normal amount of human vanity, took a certain melancholy pleasure in his brief periods of public importance.

With the entrance of Doc Piper, however, he managed to contort his round, good-natured face into a semblance of professional gravity and modify his brisk trot to a proper funereal cadence.

But the effect was lost on the little doctor who inquired profanely as to what the —— he'd been eating, and whether he thought he had a bellyache.

Cal hastily disclaimed the possession of any bodily ailment. Doc Piper was known to have a way of deciding these matters without reference to the patient and giving summary treatment, with or without the victim's consent.

"Then what are you looking like that about?" demanded the little doctor unconvinced.

"My Lord, doc—" a pained expression flitted across the undertaker's good-natured face— "I got Pom Fairfield's body in here. I got to observe some decency about it, ain't I?"

"Humph, I suppose so—if that's your notion of doing it. Body been here long?"

"I just now brought it in." Cal was beginning to revert to his every-day manner. "And say, doc, it's a caution the way that poor feller's smashed up."

"Hm, yes," was Doc Piper's comment. "Cal, I want to make an examination of that body."

The undertaker was dubious.

"You know, doc, it ain't regular—" he began doubtfully.

"Just try to stop me," the little doctor cut him short grimly as he clanked his rusty spurs across the floor, and entered the little room where the body lay.

Cal's protest was drowned in the slam of the door. Like every one else who circulated in Doc Piper's orbit he knew the futility of trying to prevent his doing anything he had made up his mind to do, so he waited uneasily until when the clock had ticked out ten minutes, the little doctor reappeared, his weazened face twisted into a grim and unlovely smile. Doc Piper's battle flag was flying.

"Know anything about this case?" he demanded.

Cal scratched his round head.

"Why, no," he said after a moment's pause, "not beyond what they said at the inquest. Matlack and Wales testified that they rode up the line with Pom as far as Ethan Durie's to look at some land. They got out there, but Ethan wasn't to home so they come back. Pom didn't get more than around the bend before he run over the edge. Jim Crewes found him and come for you. You know the rest."

"Hm, no," said the little doctor, "I don't know the rest, but I aim to."

Cal's round face showed bewilderment.

"What are you drivin' at, doc?" he asked.

"Just this. If I was you, Cal, I'd leave that body like it is for a little. There'll be an autopsy."

"An autopsy! What for?"

"What's an autopsy generally for?" snapped the little doctor. "Don't be any more of a fool than you look, Cal."

With this parting shot the little man clanked himself out of the store, his weazened face a mask of puzzlement.

"Now what the ——," he mused as he ambled down the little town's one dirt street. "Now what the ——?"

"Suppose it's all so," he ruminated. "How'm I going about to prove it? Can't tell from lookin' at Pom's body what poisoned him, or even for sure that he was poisoned at all."

Pushing up one side of his battered hat to scratch his grizzled head, he reflected that even if he could prove foul play he was a long way from being able to prove who was responsible.

"Make a pretty good guess at it though," he added grimly. "Get right down to cases, that's all I have done so far—make a guess."

"Curious," he muttered a few minutes later. "Had a fool notion and gave it rope to hang itself with. Looks now like it was due to hang somebody else."

The idea had worked out well enough so far, but after all it was an idea—no more.

"What I need is facts," he decided, "and the only two who are in a position to supply 'em are Wales and Matlack. Hm, might be worth lookin' into."

He smacked a lean brown fist into his palm.

"By the living Jingo, that's it," he snapped. "Give them a length of rope and see what they'll do with it."

THERE was fresh crêpe at the door of the drug store, and the shades were drawn, but Doc Piper was not the man to be put off by a demonstration of mourning. Without an instant's hesitation he dragged his rusty spurs around to the back of the building, found the door to the prescription room unlocked, and entered.

The partners were alone, Wales, his massive frame bent over the prescription desk, his small watery eyes intent on the mixing of a solution, while Matlack, small and sleek, his dark face set off by a spotless, white coat, leaned back in his chair, his heavily-ringed hands nursing one knee and watched listlessly.

"Afternoon, doc," he greeted. "Have a seat?"

"Don't care if I do," said the little doctor casually, returning Wales' silent nod in kind.

"Hot," suggested Matlack, rubbing his well-cared for nails on the sleeve of his white coat.

"Kind of—for the time of year."

There was a moment's silence. Matlack broke it.

"Anything we can do for you?" he asked.

"No thanks. Just dropped in to chat a little. Notice you got the front closed up. On account of Pom, I suppose."

"Yeah. Thought that was the least we could do."

Doc Piper fixed his gaze thoughtfully on Wales' broad back.

"Uh-huh," he agreed slowly, "that's about the least."

Wales swung around suddenly, his small, watery eyes dropping nervously before Doc Piper's steel-blue ones.

"Wha—what in —— would you want us to do?" he croaked harshly.

The little doctor hastened to enlighten him.

"It just come to me," he explained apologetically, "that poor Miz' Fairfield might be needing some help, now Pom's gone. I thought maybe you two, being Pom's friends an' all——"

With a grunt Wales turned back to his work. Matlack cleared his throat uneasily.

"I'm sorry to hear she's in poor circumstances, doc," he said. "If you're fixing to get up a subscription list the firm would be glad to head it with—say, fifty dollars."

The little doctor smiled.

"I knew you boys would feel right generous about it," he informed them, "but to tell the truth a subscription list wasn't exactly what I had in mind. I thought, maybe you'd feel like kind of letting on to her that Pom had owned a half interest in the store. That would take care of her the rest of her life."

"What?"

It was Wales' harsh croak which broke the amazed silence which the little doctor's proposal had produced.

"You heard me, I reckon."

"But, doc," protested Matlack suavely, "you must be joking. That would be carrying the thing pretty far, you know."

"I don't reckon it would be a bit too far," persisted the little doctor mildly.

"We ain't in business for our health. You're crazy in the head," croaked Wales, wheeling around to the desk again with an air of finality.

"That isn't just the way I'd have put it," corroborated Matlack smoothly. "We're sorry as we can be for Mrs. Fairfield, and of course we want to do everything in reason, but this— You can see for yourself that it's not resasonable, doc."

"Dear me!"

The very mildness of the little doctor's tone and that innocuous, "Dear me," should have warned them. Those who knew Doc Piper knew that so long as he stuck to strange double-jointed expletives and seemed to be at the final point of exasperation there was nothing very serious to be feared. It was when his tone became like honey and his strongest ejaculations, "Dear, dear," or, "My goodness" that the wise man hunted cover.

But the partners failed to note the danger signal. Wales worked on in stolid silence. Matlack smoothed his sleek black hair and suavely explained and regretted their inability to do as the little doctor asked.

"And after all, doc," he concluded, "much as we'd like to do anything we could for Pom's wife, it isn't up to us to give away half our business to her."

Doc Piper slowly rolled himself a brown-paper cigaret, lighted it, leaned his chair back against the wall and hooked his toes into the rungs.

"I was afraid you'd feel that way about it," he said mildly, "but maybe I can make you see it different. You see I just stopped into Cal Houseman's place and looked over Pom's body."

Matlack's swarthy face tensed ever so slightly, but aside from this he made no sign.

"It struck me," went on Doc Piper gently, "that it might be interesting to perform an autopsy."

Wales wheeled around and faced him.

"It did, did it?" he began threateningly, but his partner cut him short.

"Shut up," he admonished him swiftly, and Wales subsided.

"An autopsy?" Matlack went on, addressing Doc Piper. "Why the man's neck was broken."

"Dear me, yes," agreed the little doctor, "but just the same, I thought an autopsy——"

"Well," challenged Matlack, "what of it? What's it got to do with us?"

"Why it seemed to me that if there should be anything found—anything Pom had eat that might have disagreed with him for instance, it might be unpleasant for you boys, you being the last people that was seen with him. But I thought that maybe, if you wanted to give his wife half the business, an autopsy might not be necessary."

"O-oh, so that's the way it is. You're too old for blackmail, doc. That's what it is—plain blackmail."

Doc Piper waved his cigaret airily.

"A rose by any other name—" he suggested.

Wales fixed his small watery eyes on him.

"What you claim is that we took Pom Fairfield up to the cliff, and poisoned him, and threw him and his car over," he croaked harshly. "Is that it?"

"Oh, no," said the little doctor reassuringly. "I just say that Pom was dead when you drove up the road with him. I thought it might be unpleasant for you boys to have to explain it, that was all."

For an instant there was a tense silence. Then Matlack threw back his head and laughed. Wales glanced at him wonderingly and followed his example.

"Doc, your dope is fine," announced Matlack at last, wiping his eyes on the sleeve of his white coat. "The only thing that's wrong with it is that half a dozen people can testify to having seen Pom driving around with us in his car some time after you imply we killed him."

"My goodness, that's so," agreed the little doctor, scratching his grizzled head. "That's so."

"Tell you what you do, doc," suggested Matlack. "You be thinking up another funny one while I laugh at this one."

"Wales," he said, turning to his partner, "this is good enough to have a drink on—a real drink. You trot up front and mix up a couple of long cool ones for the doc and me. Good and strong," he added with a sidelong glance. "You know how to mix it."

For an instant the man hesitated, his little watery eyes fixed on Matlack's dark ones.

"Step along," ordered the latter. "Fix 'em up right."

"All the same," persisted Doc Piper when Wales had lumbered off on his errand, "it looks like an autopsy might be a little difficult to explain. What do you think?"

"Good Lord, doc. Still on that tack?"

"I can't get it out of my head," confessed the little doctor simply.

"Well, look here," Matlack's tone was grave. "Of course there's nothing in this idea of yours. Still, we can't afford to have any one saying this sort of thing about us. But a half-interest in the business— Good Lord, doc, it's out of all reason. If you'd said a tenth, now?"

He paused expectantly. Doc Piper considered the end of his cigaret with great concentration.

"Or even a fifth. I'd hate to see Pom's widow in financial difficulties. Wales is kind of hard-boiled, but he's a good fellow, and I could maybe persuade him to a fifth."

He stopped suddenly as Wales entered, bearing two long glasses on a tray and accompanied by a pleasant tinkle of cracked ice.

"Excuse me for taking the first one," apologized Matlack as his partner handed him one.

The little doctor took the other, smiling his thanks.

"How about you?" he inquired.

"I don't drink," croaked Wales shortly.

"Well, it's a bad habit," agreed Doc Piper, "but a mighty pleasant one. Pretty color."

He held it up to the light and examined it narrowly through half-closed eyes, while Wales watched him, rigid.

"Well, here's how," suggested Matlack raising his glass.

"How."

The doctor raised his glass half-way to his lips, checked it, and cocked his ear toward the door.

"Sounds like the sheriff's voice out there," he explained hastily. "I've got to see him. Be right back."

With the glass still in his hand he started for the door. Matlack was on his feet like a cat.

"Hey, doc," he protested. "Wait a minute."

The little doctor paused, glancing over his shoulder.

"Dear me, what's the matter?" he asked impatiently. "I'm not going to say anything to him about what we were talking about."

Matlack laughed harshly.

"I'm not worrying about that," he scoffed. "But drink your drink before the ice melts. Sheriff'll be around all afternoon."

"Afraid I might miss him," persisted the little doctor. "Awful important for me to see him. Be back right in a minute."

"We can't have you taking that drink out there. Somebody'll spot it."

"Bunk."

Doc Piper took a step forward.

On the word Wales' bulk slid between the little doctor and the door.

"Drink it up," he croaked hoarsely, his watery eyes bulging.

The little man's eyes traveled swiftly along the shelf of bottles at his right. He transferred the glass to his left hand.

"My goodness," he remarked pleasantly enough, "you boys seem mighty hard set to keep me with you."

"Drink it up," croaked Wales again.

Doc Piper glanced from one to the other. Wales, his heavy face white and gleaming with beads of sweat, blocked the doorway bulkily, while Matlack stood against the wall, his swarthy face twitching.

"I'm afraid it mightn't agree with me," said the old doctor sweetly. "It didn't with Pom, you know. Better use a gun, the way you did with Nelson."

FOR a split second all three held their places, rigid. Then Wales' hand shot back to a hip pocket and at the same instant, as if by a prearranged signal Doc Piper's arm flashed out, jerked a bottle from the shelf, and swung it in a swift arc.

The heavy glass stopper flew out and the contents took Wales full in the face, just as he jerked an automatic loose. As he crashed to the floor with a strangled scream Matlack sprang, cat-like, just in time to have the bottle itself smack cleanly against the point of his chin.

For an instant he gazed stupidly, then slowly crumpled to his knees and pitched forward onto his face.

Doc Piper coughed and wiped his eyes.

"Dear me," he said, gazing at Wales, writhing and screaming on the floor, "I'm glad I changed my mind and used ammonia instead of vitriol."

Bending over the unconscious form of Matlack he scrutinized it intently for a moment.

"Safe for a few minutes I guess," was his verdict.

Delaying an instant to set the still untasted drink on the prescription counter he bolted out of the door and down the street, his bow legs twinkling in the best speed of which he was capable.

It was perhaps fifteen minutes before he returned, with his bosom crony, Sheriff Hen Rogers bewildered and protesting at his heels. Doc Piper, his rusty spurs clanking, his battered hat canted on one side, took a quick survey of the scene and stopped short.

The two bodies still lay prone, but with a difference. Matlak, whom he had left near the door was over by the prescription desk, while Wales had stopped writhing and choking, and lay very still.

"My goodness," ejaculated the little doctor in amazement, and then flashed a glance at the drink he had left on the prescription desk.

It was gone. An instant later he saw the empty glass on the floor.

Like a flash he was on his knees beside Matlack, while the sheriff stared aghast. He ripped open the white jacket and listened for heart-beats. He did the same for Wales. Then he rose and dusted off his hands.

"Dear, dear," he said slowly. "I never thought of that. Now who would have thought of that?"

He appealed to the sheriff, who stood, mouth open, staring at the bodies.

"Are they—" he began.

"My goodness, yes. Dead. Matlack must have come to while I was fetching you. Mighty careless of me to leave that stuff within reach."

"Poison?"

"I should say so. Same stuff they gave Pom Fairfield I'd say. I meant to analyse it, but Matlack must have come to and give some of it to Wales before he finished it off himself. He knew there was no chance for 'em to get away."

A note of exasperation crept into the sheriff's voice.

"If it ain't too much trouble, Doc," he suggested with heavy sarcasm, "would you mind tellin' me how come? And you might add what it's got to do with Pom Fairfield."

"All right, doggone it."

Briefly, and with a paucity of detail that maddened his listener, the little doctor described how he had been called to the scene of the accident, how he had returned and set the broken leg of Margie McCrimmon's puppy and how she had told him that Pom Fairfield, Wales and Matlack had been in the car that had run over it. He mentioned the fact that they had gone on without stopping.

"That set me to studying about it," he went on, "so I got Cal Houseman to let me have a look at the body. Couldn't tell but mighty little without an autopsy, but it looked to me like he might have been poisoned."

"Huh!" snorted the sheriff incredulously. "And then?"

"The rest was more or less a shot in the dark. I couldn't figure out why they'd poison Pom unless he had something on 'em—something bad. It looked like they were afraid of him, so I figured that maybe, if they were just as much afraid of me, they'd try the same game.

"I wish I had that drink they gave me," he broke off. "I'd like to know what sort of stuff would act so quick. I tried to get out of the store with it, but they weren't going to have that."

"They ganged up on you?" suggested the sheriff.

The little doctor glanced at the two bodies prone on the floor.

"Humph, yes. You might say they did," he admitted. "That was when I accused 'em of murdering Nelson."

"Nelson?" echoed the sheriff in amazed incredulity.

"Dod-rot it, yes. Nelson," snapped the little doctor. "They're the ones all right. Let's see, where was I?"

"They'd ganged up on you," suggested the sheriff meekly.

"Well, that's all," said Doc Piper, "let's send for the coroner. I want to get home."

"Oh, do you?" remarked the sheriff grimly. "Well, you're not going to until I know something more about this thing than I know now. How come you to think these two had murdered Pom Fairfield in the first place?"

"Judas priest, sheriff, what would you think when two men hauled a dead body through town in the middle of the day and dumped it and an expensive car over a cliff. You'd say that was just a harmless prank, I reckon. Boys will be boys, you'd say."

The sheriff scratched his head.

"But look-a-here, doc," he persisted. "What license did you have to think Pom was dead when the three of them was riding around."

"Ever go bird hunting with Pom?" the doctor asked patiently.

"Yeah, heap of times. What's that got to do with it?"

Doc Piper ignored the question.

"Watched him handle his dogs, I reckon?"

The sheriff nodded.

"Humph! Heap of times you don't act right bright, sheriff. If Pom Fairfield ever run over a bird-dog and didn't stop to see how bad it was hurt it was because he was dead and couldn't help himself. Sometimes if you showed just twice as much sense you'd be half-witted."

MID-SUMMER NIGHT

A Complete Novelette

Leonard H. Nason

Author of "Five Hundred Francs," "The Luger," etc.

"WELL," remarked Sergeant Eadie, "let's dry our tears. There's a war on, and casualties are to be expected."

The sergeant and the three men who were with him climbed up a bank and stood forlornly on the edge of a causeway that ran through a little grove of woods. Just before them, half hidden by the trees and undergrowth, was the wreck of what had been a fine battery of field artillery. There were no gunners visible; they were all trying to snatch a little sleep. Let the infantry implore for fire as they might, let barrage rockets make a Fourth of July celebration of the Summer sky, this battery would heed them not. Their pistols they had by them for that time when the Hun should appear in the wheat in front of the battery, but until then their time was their own, and the seventy-fives would remain silent against the commands of the Chief of the Armies himself.

This battery had been out of ammunition since eleven o'clock that morning. To the north, the sector of the Marne bank that should have been covered with a curtain of steel was wide open; and the enemy with its kitchens, wheeled transport and engines of war, was pouring across the river, through the positions that the American infantry had held until they had been hewed down to the last man.

The four men looked sadly out beyond the guns. Blue sky and green trees and pleasant, rolling fields of yellow wheat, with little white farm-houses glimmering here and there. Mid-Summer's afternoon, when a man should think of naught but a book and a hammock and perhaps a nice, nice girl in a white dress.

These four men had seen death reach out his hand and snatch their comrades many times that day. Sergeant Eadie was an observer on duty with the infantry, and was but now returned from the first line through the slaughter-house that the enemy bombardment had made of the roads.

Ham, the second man, was a corporal of machine-gunners. He and his men had carried wounded all the preceding night and had had no time to set up their guns.

The other two men, Sployd and a man of French descent called "the Frog," were but hewers of wood and drawers of water. They had done nothing but go up and down the causeway between the guns and the kitchen, carrying coffee and food to the gunners, wringing their hands and bewailing the hard fate that kept them aboveground. When the battery ceased firing the Germans paid it no more attention, so that the position was now quite safe and would be until the battery went into action again.

"Mid-Summer Night," copyright, 1923, by Leonard H. Nason.

Ham, the machine-gunner, looked over his shoulder at what lay below them at the causeway's base, then looked hastily away again. The Frog and Sployd also looked and were very near to tears. Eadie noticed their glances.

"Forget it," he said. "Forget it. We've got enough to worry us without thinking about that. Let's go somewhere we can't see it."

"Or smell it," said Sployd.

"It don't smell!" cried Ham. "There ain't no smell to it."

"There is too!" cried Sployd. "I c'n smell it just as plain! Aw, them —— —— Huns!"

"Don't swear like that," admonished Eadie. "It doesn't do you any good."

"Is that so? Well, fer a guy that said the things you did a minute or so ago you're a good man to talk about swearin'. Gee! I wouldn't talk to myself like that, let alone some other guys."

"I had a good excuse," answered Eadie. "If you had had a box full of chow blown up on you, you'd swear. I'm not a swearing man, but there are times when there's nothing else to do."

The captain appeared suddenly from in back of them.

"We're getting ammunition up very soon," he said, "and I want you men to jump right in and help unload it, non-coms as well as every one else. Did I hear them say you'd been swearing, Eadie? I thought you had the reputation of never swearing."

"This is my birthday today, sir," answered Eadie, "and yesterday I got a boxful of chow from my aunt. She lives in Bordeaux, you know. I tucked it away, and we were going to have a party when I came off duty. When we went to get it just now we found Jerry had dumped a shell on my dugout, and the box was a total loss. There wasn't anything left but cake-crumbs and some broken bottles. I'll say I swore. If it hadn't been for that box I'd have been up on the front yet, down in a nice deep cellar. I haven't had anything to eat since supper last night, either."

"They seemed to have knocked that so-called dugout of yours into a fine lot of kindling-wood," said the captain. "Lucky you weren't in it. Let's go down and see if we can find the fuse."

The captain and the sergeant climbed down the slight slope the causeway made and followed the other three, whose faces registered the deepest sympathy. Their sympathy was all the more intense since they had expected to help dispose of the food that the wrecked birthday box had contained.

The captain turned over the dirt with his toe, kicking little bits of steel from the burst shell and turning over bits of cake and shredded cigarets from the birthday box that lay—alas!—an unrecognizable heap of splinters. The exploring foot struck something larger than the bits of shell and broken wood.

"What's this?" muttered the officer, bending over. "Why, here's some of the chow that escaped the general destruction! It doesn't seem to be very much, though."

The soldiers clustered eagerly about while the sergeant opened a small, square box that had been thickly enveloped in paper. Inside the first box was another white one.

"——!" muttered Ham. "I thought it was going to be a cheese."

Eadie opened the second box.

"Well, can you imagine that!" he cried. "God bless the old girl, she's sent me a watch! Hot dog!" he exclaimed, examining the watch more closely. "It's what you might call a darb!"

The captain peered over the sergeant's shoulder.

"It is at that," he agreed. "It's a stop watch, isn't it?"

"It's one of those doofunny French officers' watches," explained Eadie. "When you hear a shell start you punch the gimmick at the top, and when the shell explodes, punch it again. Then you can read on this dial here"—pointing—"the distance in meters of the gun that fired the shell."

"Well, it's very fine that something was left, after all," said the captain. "You'd rather the chow was ruined and the watch saved, wouldn't you? Well, I must be on my way to see what can be done about a little dinner for this outfit. We'll fire this afternoon if I can get any ammunition, but —— knows when we'll get a chance to eat again."

"Sployd," added the captain suddenly, "did you deliver my message to the chaplain?"

"Yessir."

"What did he say?"

"He said he'd be over as soon as he could, but that he was terribly busy."

"He'd better come over, or I'll drag him by the neck! I want my boys to have a decent burial."

Here his voice broke, and his lip quivered.

"God knows how I can ever face their mothers!"

Two great tears rolled down his cheeks while the four soldiers stood silently listening to the thumping of their hearts.

"Meanwhile," said the captain, pulling himself together, "I'd better see that the rest of the outfit doesn't die of starvation."

Then he went off toward the kitchen, wiping his nose on a bandanna and shifting his pistol so that it would not fall out of his pocket when he walked.

Shells began to whistle by overhead, exploding in a clump of trees about two or three hundred yards away. The four soldiers cast themselves to earth and then shamefacedly got up again.

"Those shells aren't tagged for us," said Ham. "They're goin' over to the frog battery."

"I could tell that from the sound," said Eadie, wiping the dirt from his face. "But you jugheads all flopped, and I didn't want to be the only man standing up. You birds make me nervous anyway."

The sound of the passing shells continued. There was a battery of French motor artillery in that grove, and the Germans had decided to silence it. The shells burst with much spouting of dirt, most of them among the trees, but some in the field. A considerable cloud of smoke gathered, which served as a background for the flashes of the bursting shells.

The four men watched, fascinated, knowing that in that grove were men dying horribly, dugouts caving in, shell-dumps on fire, wounded men crying for aid and being wounded again and again, and that the destruction of the battery was proceeding with deliberation and thoroughness.

"That's what it looked like when they pounded us this morning," said Sployd finally. "Only Jerry didn't do so good a job on us as he's doin' on them."

"He's got lots of time left," remarked Ham.

The Frog sighed heavily.

"No more *coneyac* from that outfit," said he. "Now I call that tough, just when I was getting a good drag with the mess sergeant, too."

"Oh, Sergeant Eadie," called the captain from the end of the causeway. "Bring those other men here and give me a hand."

The four turned their attention from the cloud of smoke across the field to the beckoning captain and went down the causeway to see what he wanted. Eadie hoped that it was not some sticky, juicy casualty that the captain wanted them to carry to a first-aid station. It wasn't, but it was a disagreeable job he had for them to do just the same.

The causeway ended at another road that led northward into the wheat-fields, a grass-grown track that was hardly discernible. By the side of this road, far enough back in the woods to escape observation from enemy airmen, was the battery kitchen.

There was a tarpaulin spread on a spare wagon-pole, under which were the supplies and the blankets of the kitchen detail. The rolling kitchen was drawn up just at one side of the tarpaulin. The ground all about looked as if numbers of hogs had been rooting there, and the bushes were broken and torn.

There were fresh scars on the tree-trunks as if they had been blazed with an ax. On the stove part of the rolling kitchen was a pan of bacon; and another full of cut bread—that hard French kind that had to be cut with a saw—was on the ground under the tarpaulin.

"It looks as if it had been rather warm here," remarked the captain, looking around at the shattered trees. "Where the —— are all the cooks?"

The mouth of a shallow dugout caught his eye.

"Conrad!" the captain roared. "Mott! Come out here! Bring that chow up to the gunners!"

There was a deep silence. The captain moved nearer the mouth of the dugout and called down it—

"Is there any one down there?"

There was another silence; then from the dugout came a faint reply—

"No, sir."

SWOOOOOSH—*KECHUG!* The captain stood very straight, his neck bent curiously at an angle. Eadie rested on his elbows, just as he had cast himself at the first whistle of the shell.

The Frog half-turned away, his arms about his head. Ham rested on hands and knees with open mouth, and Sployd stood as he was, his eyes protruding and jaw hanging on his chest. In the center of the group, on the ground, a small whirlwind was in action, dead leaves flying, twigs snapping and a soft spinning sound. Then all was quiet.

The men still held their frozen attitudes, especially Eadie. That whirlwind was about four inches in front of his nose. He looked at it earnestly; and as the leaves ceased to fly and the thing grew quieter he perceived that a blunt steel nose sniffed at him, slowly turning over and over. The men who were standing could see the full length of it—slim and cold and gray, with a belly-band of softer metal about its middle. They still regarded it with horror after it had stopped turning.

Finally Ham exhaled his breath in a long sigh. There was a slight, scattering noise, and Sployd disappeared. So swift was his flight that no eye might follow it.

Eadie began to work himself slowly backward like a crab, still keeping his eyes on that steel cigar among the leaves. The captain cleared his throat noisily, then croaked once or twice like an asthmatic frog. Finally he was able to speak.

"That—that was a dud," he said huskily.

"It didn't explode, did it?" asked Ham with chattering teeth.

"I'll say it didn't," replied the captain. "If it had we'd have been knocking on the pearly gates right now."

Eadie leaned against a tree until the dizziness that was on him should pass away. He felt very much the same as he had once upon a time when he had sampled some new and heady liquors on the occasion of his arrival in France. There was the same unstability of the ground, the same dull ache to the head and the same sense of unfitness in the stomach.

Another rushing whistle ripped the silence. All down this time, flat. The crash of the explosion was stunning. Stones and bits of broken branches pattered down, and a cloud of dust rose. Cautiously the heads came up to see who had been hit.

"Where did that one go?" they muttered, and the stench of high explosive made them cough.

Four heads appeared. All safe.

"For ——'s sake," cried the captain, "let's grab this chow and rush it out of here while we can!"

They all dashed for the rolling kitchen, but Eadie came to a sudden halt. As he went by the tarpaulin he saw that the under side of it was plastered thick with great gobs of scarlet. Just creeping around the pile of rations was a tiny stream of red.

"Oh, ——," said Eadie, "there's some one hit! On the other side of the rations!"

"Poor man," he turned away. He had seen so many mangled bodies that day that he winced from the sight of another as one does from the surgeon's knife. In his mind he could see the corpse on the other side of that pile, disemboweled, eviscerated, horrible.

"Who's got a first-aid packet?" cried the captain, running around the pile. "Huh!" he exclaimed. "We don't need first aid; we need a shovel! That shell hit right in the middle of the tomato-cans. Good-by a sack of spuds, too."

"My ——," said Ham, peering over the captain's shoulder. "Lookit the tomatoes! The place looks as if they'd been stickin' pigs."

There was a chorus of hysterical laughter; then they rushed at the rolling kitchen. The captain and Ham seized the pan of bacon and put the pan of bread on top of it. The Frog and Eadie hoisted the marmite can of coffee out of the stove; and the four retreated as rapidly as they could, leaving the cook still in undisputed possession of the dugout.

"I'll fix that guy Sployd!" muttered Eadie between his teeth as he staggered along with the can of coffee. "If he was here I know where my foot would be now. How does he get that way! Beating it off when there's work to do!"

"I heard you swear again just now," remarked the Frog. "You're getting real rough. That's twice today."

"I didn't swear," said Eadie. "That was a prayer. I thought all those tomatoes scattered around were blood. Well, here we are at last. Set it down now. I suppose the Old Man will want us to issue the chow out, too."

The Old Man did, and the weary gunners had the unique experience of being served by non-commissioned officers, so that they forgot much of their fatigue in their enjoyment thereof.

This battery belonged to a division that had come upon the front about eleven days before. They had spent the time peacefully, sleeping and eating and doing a little firing each night and thinking what a fine place the front was. The Germans had let them severely alone. After a day or so of peace the men became careless; they wandered about the roads and fields in broad daylight; they took no heed to the fact that though he might be invisible, there was an alert and active enemy on the far bank of the Marne. The Germans fired very, very seldom, and then only to bracket—get the range—on newly arrived artillery.

The rumor grew that the Germans had retired, and then all thoughts of concealment disappeared. Trucks bringing up supplies turned around in the wheat in front of gun positions. Kitchens fired up at all hours of day or night. Transport moved on the roads whenever it saw fit.

Consequently when the Germans had made all their preparations and were ready to launch the drive that was to end the war they knew every American position, machine gun, field gun or heavy; they knew every trench-line and how strong the garrison was; they knew what time reliefs and ration details went up to the front and the paths they used; in short, they knew as much about the Amercian sector as the American High Command did, and probably more.

Then, having stacked the cards in their favor, the Germans launched their offensive. They shelled the roads, the fields, the farm-houses and every little path and cow-track. They drowned the sector in gas.

When the waves of German infantry crossed the Marne they expected to encounter no resistance for five or six kilometers. Judge then of their surprize when American troops rose up under the Germans' noses on the south bank of the river, when a murderous machine-gun fire swept the boats in which the enemy troops were crossing and when they found, instead of a demoralized mob, a very peppery, wrathy body of troops, most eager to close with the enemy, either with bayonet or fist.

By noon of the first day the Germans had advanced through the French on the American right and were well in rear of the American positions. In front of the Americans the enemy had partial possession of the south bank of the Marne, the towns of Fossoy and Mézy and one or two farm-houses and were about ready to cry quits and go home. In the early part of the afternoon both sides took a breather in preparation for going at it once more later on.

Sergeant Eadie's battery had had its share of casualties. A direct hit had been scored on one gun, disabling it. By doubling up and impressing machine-gunners into service the other three guns had been kept in action until the ammunition had run out. When the battery had ceased to fire, the enemy ceased shelling it, for he had too much on his mind to shell inactive positions.

WHEN the bacon had been about half-served there was a rattling noise from the far end of the causeway, that came nearer and nearer. A dark shape, sweeping the trees on either side, made its appearance, slowly advancing on the battery position.

"Trucks!" cried some one. "Git that chow off the road! Here comes the ammunition."

The gunners rose up from where they sat with their mouths full of bacon and cursed whole-heartedly. Those that had not yet been fed added their moans to the general complaint, demanding to know when they should eat.

The four trucks drove slowly along until they were opposite the gun positions, then stopped. The captain and the executive officer of the battery appeared, and an officer descended from one of the tracks.

"I'd like to get unloaded as soon as possible," said the truck officer. "This is a bad place to be caught by hostile fire. I shouldn't have come so far forward, but this is an emergency."

"Everybody up!" called the battery commander. "Gunners, telephone men, non-coms, everybody, unload these trucks and take the shells up to the guns."

"Pile them in small piles back of each gun," added the executive. "Don't put too many in a pile, so if the pile is struck they won't all explode."

The shells for the seventy-fives were packed in long boxes, like coffins. These boxes were first unloaded from the trucks, then opened, and the shells carried to the guns. The afternoon was hot, and the men had a mortal fear of a bombardment commencing, for it seemed impossible for those trucks to remain on the causeway very long without being seen by the enemy balloons. The shells were heavy, one shell being all that a man could carry at a time, and the heat and nervous strain that the men were working under did not lighten their labor.

Eadie sat down on a gun-trail and mopped the sweat from his face.

"I'm a sergeant," he remarked, "and am not ranked by any one in this battery except the top kick. I risked my life to come back here from the forward positions this morning, and what thanks do I get? First they make a cook's police out of me, and then they set me to work lugging shells. This is a fine place for an observer. I suppose they'll have the observation detail digging ditches like the machine-gunners next."

"This is a —— of a war, ain't it?" agreed the section chief, who was directing the placing of the shell heaps. "Let's you and me organize a union and strike for nine hours' war a day, Sundays and Saturday afternoons off. We oughta get higher wages, too, and a *vin rooge* issue like the frogs get. Wadda yuh say?"

"Aw, there's no use trying to get sympathy from you," said Eadie gloomily. "You're only half-witted anyway."

"I am, huh? You don't see me gettin' all sweat up luggin' ammunition, do yuh?"

"How did you get out of it?" inquired Eadie.

"If you wasn't such a nitwit, you'd know without askin'. When the Old Man hollers, 'Everybody up,' don't go. He ain't gonna call the roll, is he? He don't know whether you go or not. All right, then; I stayed right in my little hole. Then when they lugs the shells, who but the brave section chief of number one piece shows 'em where to stack 'em? The Old Man goes by and says—

" 'Very good, sergeant; not too many in a pile; that's right.' "

"Well, if you aren't the prize goldbrick!" said Eadie half-admiringly.

"That's me," grinned the section chief. "What it takes to make a goldbrick I'm all broke out with. They can say what they want, the goldbrick is the guy in this man's army that gets the best deal."

Eadie pondered the section chief's words as he sweated up and down back of the guns with the heavy shells. He was not the only non-com. working. Ham, the machine-gun corporal, the telephone sergeant, the gunner-corporals of all three pieces—number two had been knocked out and all its crew killed—even the top himself, were blistering their hands and straining their backs carrying ammunition.

At last the trucks were all unloaded, and the officer in charge of them began to wonder how he was going to get them out. There was no turning around on the causeway, for it was too narrow; and it was too far to back up the way they had come.

"Can I get through the wheat to the Courboin road?" the officer asked the captain.

"I don't know," said the Old Man. "Let's ask Sergeant Eadie; he's supposed to know where all these cart-paths go." Every one howled for Eadie, who came running.

"Yessir," he told the officer; "this causeway joins a road through the wheat, that brings you out on the road from La Rocque and Grèves Farm to Courboin. It's open for about five hundred yards, and then you can duck out of sight over the hill."

"Hm," said the officer.

And then he peered through a rift in the trees at the *Drachen* bobbing on the horizon.

"Five hundred yards and the sky full of Dutch balloons."

"By the time the man in the balloon has you spotted and gets word to a battery and the battery gets ready to fire, you'll be out of sight. There's no cross-roads anywhere near you, so they'll have to figure their range and all their fire dope. Cross-roads and farmhouses they have all figured, you know, and can cut loose instantly, but a moving target is another thing."

They made the following arrangement: The first truck was to dash out followed by the rest with about twenty yards interval between each. The drivers climbed to their seats, threw away their cigarets and started their motors, each one peering grimly ahead and the men on the seat with them looking very jumpy and nervous. Away the trucks went, motors roaring, each one following the other as soon as the necessary interval had been gained.

When the first truck was about a hundred yards out in the wheat and the fourth one had just cleared the woods, so that the whole train was in full view, the driver of the first truck slowed to make a difficult turn where a trench ran parallel to the road for a short distance. When he tried to speed up again he stalled his engine. The remaining trucks came to a profane stop.

The watching artillerymen went each to his own place of refuge as rapidly as they could put foot to ground, and the first shell shrieked at them as they fled. *Wham! Wham! Wham!* Big boys, eight-inch at least. The artillerymen crouched low and thanked whatever gods may be that they had a hole to get into and were not truck-drivers.

"I guess you miscalculated a bit on the time it takes a German battery to get into action," the captain said to Eadie, talking out of the side of his mouth, for he and the observer were in a shallow pit about six inches deep and the captain had his face tightly pressed against the side. He feared that if he turned his head it would bring his skull in range of one of those whistling fragments.

"Maybe they had that road bracketed," replied the sergeant. "They aren't shooting at us anyway."

"No; but if one of those squarehead gunners gives an eighth of a turn too much to his traversing-wheel he drops one of those G. I. cans right here among you and me."

The shelling shifted to a target a little farther away. Cautious heads appeared.

"Hey! Look!" they cried.

Instead of the burning wreck of the ammunition-train, out on the distant road, for all the world like a galloping elephant, was the last truck getting away to safety. Just in rear of it was what appeared to be an enormous bouquet of flowers, except that the color of it was a dirty gray. This was one of Jerry's messengers of good cheer exploding.

"Thank —— they're gone!" quoth the Old Man. "Sergeant Eadie, come here; I've got a job for you."

Eadie climbed out of the hole and stood at the battery commander's side. The captain was fingering his lower lip thoughtfully.

"Eadie," he said finally, "I suppose you know you're the only man left that can adjust fire, now that Wilson and McClure have—have left us."

"Yessir," said Eadie.

"I've got to have an observer," continued the captain. "Anyway the major wanted you to go up with the telephone detail and help find a new O. P.* It seems there's not much left of the old one."

"I'll say not," replied Eadie. "Just a hole in the ground with smoke coming out of it. I took one look at it last night and went away."

"Well, get yourself a blanket and a first-aid packet and report to the battalion. And in case I don't see you again, here's good luck."

The captain extended his hand, and he and the sergeant looked each other between the eyes and exchanged grips. Then the captain went back to his command post, and Eadie went soberly off to get some pistol ammunition and a first-aid packet. He had no concern about the blanket; there would be plenty lying around loose where he was going.

Eadie experienced a sick feeling about his heart. The night before, when the drive began, he had been at the forward O. P. Awakened by the first salvo of the bombardment, he had found the observation post destroyed and had fled to La Rocque Farm, where the infantry headquarters were.

In the morning he had returned to his battery through the wreckage of field trains destroyed by the bombardment, past shattered heaps that had been farmhouses when he had passed them the night before. His mind was almost turned by the sight of so many dead and dying men, lying everywhere in field and road, so that no matter where he went he could not avoid seeing them. And now he must go back there again.

"Have you seen Ham anywhere?" Eadie demanded of the goldbrick section chief.

"He's out in the woods settin' up his guns."

"I want to give him my wrist-watch. I won't need it any more; I've got a new one. Give it to him for me, will you? Tell him I said good-by to him."

"Sure, I'll tell him. Want me t' write your girl, too?"

"You won't need to write any girl for me," replied Eadie hotly. "I'm going to take your advice. I know where there's a good deep cellar; and just as soon as I get up to it I'm going to climb down in, and that will be the end of me until tomorrow morning.

"I'm through with answering, 'Here!' every time somebody yells for a man to carry a message, or for an artilleryman to locate targets. It doesn't get you anything but a hole in the ground that you have to share with a horse or two, and a wooden cross at your head. If you want to find out how to be a goldbrick and a camouflager, regard me!"

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*Observation post.

"You tell 'em," laughed the section chief. "You ain't got brains enough. It takes brains to be a good goldbrick."

The reply was so obvious that Eadie made none. He helped himself to a handful of pistol ammunition out of a box that had been opened, unhooked a first-aid packet from a belt that some careless soldier had left lying on the ground and took his way toward battalion headquarters.

THE sergeant went on down the causeway, passed the little road that turned off toward the kitchen and followed a path that skirted the south edge of the woods. Fritz had shelled this path the night before, for it was pitted with great holes; and junks of iron, some of them as big as a man's arm, lay scattered about. There was the very faintest hint of gas in the air.

This path connected with the main highway that led to the up-river suburbs of Château Thierry, and just beyond the highway was Petit Picpus, the farm where the battalion commander had his post of command. A French balloon swung in the next field, its truck clearly visible, and Eadie could see the machine-gunners that protected it from air attack standing about their guns, the smoke from their pipes curling upward.

"Pretty soft," he thought. "There's some goldbricks for you."

This was the only balloon that could be seen on the American side. Very probably it was up because Eadie's major had demanded a balloon in order that he might know what was going on.

A French soldier came hurrying along the path, and Eadie hailed him. He was a *caporal de tir* from the French motor battery and held the same kind of a job that the American sergeant did. Eadie's mother had been a Frenchwoman, and he addressed the corporal in his own tongue.

"*Salut, mon vieux!* How did your battery come out of the bombardment?"

"That one just now? *Ah, sâle deveine!* That was a rough one, that one. I was at the group, so I escaped it, but they say we are shot to ——, in the soup, finished. I go now to see. The Boche are at Courboin."

"Courboin! My ——!" cried Eadie in English.

The two men faced south—that is, away from the front and toward the railway that ran from Paris across France to Verdun and the east sector of the front. Paris was a long day's march away to the southwest.

To the southeast, across the field where the balloon tugged at its cable, just beyond the next stretch of woodland, was a church steeple. That was Courboin. If the enemy had taken Courboin it meant that Eadie's regiment had been cut off and that its existence as a fighting unit was near an end.

The sound of a faint popping, like aerial fireworks, made the two soldiers look up at the sky. The balloon was pitching wildly as the cable was reeled in by the motor drum. Four black balls, like tufts of wool, were just above the gas-bag. Then suddenly the air was full of them, the sound of the explosions like corn popping.

The truck to which the ballon was attached began to move out to the road, while the cable was reeled in as rapidly as possible. The sky was quite black with the bursting shrapnel. In an amazingly short time the balloon was hauled down; but it was impossible to tell from where the two soldiers were, whether it had been damaged or not. The observer had probably perished quickly amid that storm of leaden balls.

The Frenchman and the American looked at each other. The corporal grinned a sickly grin.

"*Les cochons s'baladent,*" quoth he.

Then he went his way while the American went on to Petit Picpus Farm.

The sergeant meditated on the conduct of modern war. It would seem that the German aim was not so much a destruction of man-power as it was a destruction of morale. Shatter the enemy's nerve and the battle is won. The conduct of the early part of the war, the bombardment of Paris, the shelling of the battery kitchen, and the shooting-down of the balloon all had the same end in view—the breaking-up of the moral strength of the opposing force.

Shelling a kitchen did no material damage, but it meant that a considerable number of men would have to go hungry, and a man fights but ill on an empty stomach. The shooting down of the balloon was not much of a feat. Probably the bag could be repaired and be in service again in a day or so; but the sudden cloud of shrapnel that appeared over the heads of the balloon company must have been very unnerving, not only to them, but to every one in the sector that saw it.

An airplane attacking a balloon was something tangible; but the sudden appearance of bursting shrapnel, coming from nobody knew where, is another matter. The Germans intended that it should be.

They bombarded Paris for the same reason. The shells could not be aimed; the gun that fired them was just pointed at the city and the lanyard pulled; but the moral effect of it was what Fritz was after. The newspapers in our own country and in France said that the inhabitants were not disturbed. Not much. They fled from Paris in droves. The platforms of every railway in France were jammed with refugees from the capital, with orphan asylums, hospitals, convents and what not that were being moved *en masse* to some place of safety farther south. Troop movements were slowed up and the sending forward of supplies delayed by this exodus, to say nothing of the spreading broadcast of the horrors of the bombardment. Hence the object of the bombardment was achieved.

Now on this mid-Summer's afternoon on the Marne the Germans were doing the same thing. Every man that showed his head, every body of troops that moved on a road and every battery that showed the slightest sign of activity was the recipient of a hurricane of shells. When the opposing force had been smothered with shell-fire, drenched with gas and kept sleepless and hungry long enough to reduce them to a state of semi-insanity, then the ponderous war-machine of the German Empire would move forward and accomplish what it had failed to do at the first attempt earlier in the morning; that is, capture or destroy the American forces at the junction of the Marne and Surmelin Rivers.

Eadie was forced to make a detour to avoid a grove that was being pounded with slow shell-fire. Big boys, too.

"What are they shelling that place for?" he asked himself. "There's nothing there."

Then he discovered the reason. There was the ladder-like track that a tank makes, turning off the road and going into the woods. The tank had probably gone into the woods for a chance to rest its crew or perhaps make a small repair. Then it had come out and gone back the way it came. From an airplane or a balloon it would look as if two tanks had gone into the grove and were still in there. The enemy was seeing to it that those tanks would never come out again and was searching those woods like a dog after rabbits, using heavy-caliber shells to make the destruction of the tanks a certainty. The detour that Eadie was forced to make brought him out on the high road some distance south of where he intended to be, but whence he could get a fine view of the fields to right and left.

They were dotted with geysers of dirt and smoke. From every grove and tree-clump came the sound of hammering like innumerable blacksmith shops. In the ditch were a number of wounded, resting before starting out again on their walk back to the place where they could get an ambulance or a truck. The shelling of the roads was still so heavy that no traffic was allowed except in case of direst necessity, of which the evacuation of wounded is not one.

Over on the next road a company of French troops was trotting with Fritz chasing them with six-inch shells as one throws stones after a fleeing dog. The battle certainly was raging.

"If I can only find a hole deep enough," said Eadie aloud, "I'm going to get down in it, and nothing short of a derrick will be able to get me out."

He began to trot across the fields to Little Picpus, keeping his ear peeled toward the north for the first whistle of a shell and keeping his mask in his hand ready for the faintest suspicion of gas. His morale was cracking, though he did not know it yet. He had had no sleep the night before and nothing to eat in twenty-four hours. It was well that he could not know what was in store for him.

AN HOUR later, perhaps two, a straggling line of men halted in the shade of the poplars that lined the Étampes road—Sergeant Eadie, an infantry liaison officer, the battalion telephone officer and seven wire-stringers, each with a coil of wire on his arm. They wiped the sweat from their brows and cast themselves to earth for a moment's rest.

"The major told us to continue until we secured contact and then to establish an O. P." said the telephone officer. "The point is, have we contact now?"

"I hardly think so," answered the infantryman. "That's German territory over there, but we can't see anything."

"Let's get out in the field and look around," the telephone officer suggested. "Come on, sergeant."

Eadie and the two officers walked out about twenty yards from the road. Perhaps two miles away across the river was a line of steep hills that lined the Marne, the lower slopes of them yellow with the uncut wheat and their tops green with forest. The valley itself was below the vision of the three men.

Eastward was a stretch of field and orchard to another smaller valley, the Surmelin, that joined the Marne opposite Jaulgonne. The farther hills, both to north and east, were in German territory, the first since the month before and the second since that morning. There was no sign of life anywhere. They could hear shells bursting, but they were faint and distant.

"I maintain that it's a hot day," remarked Eadie.

He unhooked his blouse collar and put his helmet on the back of his head.

"Things must have quieted down," said the telephone officer, focusing his glasses on a distant road. "There's a lot of traffic on that road over there. They seem to be resting."

Eadie grunted.

"Rest is good. They've got a good long one ahead of them. That's all wreckage over there. I came down that road this morning, and it'll stay with me the rest of my life. All those trucks and wagons and automobiles are full of dead men. The bombardment caught 'em."

The two officers looked at each other uncomfortably, as people do when one in their midst has made a social error.

"Let's change the subject," suggested the infantryman. "Let's dope out how we're going to accomplish our mission. As I understand it, we're really a scouting expedition. We've got to find out first where the Boche are and then get a place from which we can direct fire on them. I don't know how things are up here now, because I've been with the artillery since before the drive started, but it seems to me that our best bet is to go up on one of those hills overlooking the Marne."

"I wonder if I will get an opportunity to do any sound-ranging tonight?" inquired Eadie.

"Sound-ranging? What the —— are you going to do sound-ranging with?"

Eadie produced his new watch and explained the workings of it with pride. There were a number of graduated circles around the circumference of the dial in addition to the regular hour numbers. One of these circles was obviously graduated in meters, but what the others were was not so plain.

"What do those numbers mean?" asked the liaison officer, pointing to the second row.

"Well," replied Eadie thoughtfully, "huummm."

The thought occurred to him that this man was an infantry officer and would have no acquaintance with artillery terms.

"It's very complicated," continued the sergeant glibly. "Those figures—that circle, that is—are used to determine the proper settings for the corrector when shrapnel is used. It can also be used to determine the ballistic coefficient in making corrections required by atmospheric conditions."

The sergeant paused to take breath, and the telephone officer laughed very heartily.

"It's all very clear and understandable, no doubt," said the infantryman, "but it won't help us find an O. P. As I said, I'm for making for the hills to the north, even if the position is exposed."

"Suit yourself," said the telephone officer. "You pick out the O. P., and I'll lay the wire up to it."

"I think you're wrong," said Eadie. "Let's lay the wire into any of these farms and let sleeping dogs lie. I don't yearn to go hunting Boche. I hear they are at Courboin, so it won't make any difference what we do. Any of these farms will do—La Houy, La Rocque, La Pucelle—they've all got good cellars. We'll get contact soon enough after night falls. The Huns will be on our necks."

It is not customary for non-commissioned officers to offer advice without being asked, but this was different. These three men were trying to do something at minimum risk to themselves; and moreover they stood in the presence of Death, who is no respector of rank. Also, Eadie had been over that ground before, and the other two hadn't.

"I guess I am wrong at that," agreed the infantry officer, "but not the way you think. We know the enemy is across the Marne, but what is important now is to find how far south he has gone on our right flank. Nobody knows, and the airplanes of course aren't worth a ——, so it's up to us to proceed eastward instead of to the north. Any objections?"

"We'll get ourselves killed," said Eadie gloomily.

"It can only happen once," the telephone man reminded him.

"Even so," agreed Eadie, "if you got hit in the right place you'd be a long time dying in the hot sun. The Army's too busy right now to go hunting wounded in these fields."

From the look the two officers exchanged it was apparent that the sergeant had made another *faux pas*, but they said nothing. They went back to the road, gathered up the telephone men and started out for the west bank of the Surmelin.

They crossed two fields and were in the third when they passed a tiny trench about a foot deep and six inches wide in which a telephone trunk-line was laid. The telephone officer cut in on each one of the six wires that were in the trench until he found one that was alive, asked if he could be connected with Dragon Fly, the code name for the battalion P. C., found that he could and then marked the trench with a handkerchief tied to a stick.

"Remember where this is," he told his wire-stringers, "and we can cut in on it. It'll save laying wire clear back to Petit Picpus."

"I saw the Boche on that far hill this morning," said Eadie, pointing across the valley, "but whether they got down into the valley I don't know."

A faint cackling sound broke in on the stillness. The men threw up their heads, for they had not heard anything like it before.

"Sounds like hens," muttered a tall, round-shouldered man. "Maybe there's some around that the frogs left when they pulled out. Maybe we c'u'd git some eggs and cook 'em."

The telephone officer stepped hastily to one side, for there was a strange thumping noise in the ground to his right.

"I'll bet we're under fire," said he. "I think those are bullets striking."

As if he had spoken a cue the cackling became a steady roar, and bits of turf began to leap in the air from the ground around the Americans. They hurled themselves on their faces without further remark. A shell shrieked and then swooped down upon them. It was not very near, but still too close for comfort.

The next one was nearer and threw dirt on them. It was impossible to speak so that the men of the detail could hear, and each officer decided that the best thing to do was to jump up and make a dash for the woods, assuming that the men would follow.

The third shell brought a cry from some one, and while the smoke of it lay heavily about, the telephone officer and the infantry officer both leaped to their feet and dashed for the woods. Unfortunately each picked a different direction. The telephone men of course followed their own officer, with the exception of one, who happened to be lying near the infantryman.

Eadie lay next to this last, and when he saw him arise to his feet and depart, did likewise. He was somewhat surprized to see the infantry officer streaking for the woods, followed by one lone telephone man, but it was no place to stand and marvel.

The wire-stringers, running in a bunch and presenting the better target, drew the fire of the machine gun on themselves. Several of them, including their officer, were hit. When the rest reached the woods there being no one to give the word to stop and lie down, they continued to carry on, nor paused to draw breath until they brought the word to Petit Picpus that they were the sole survivors of the wire party.

Meanwhile the other three lay panting on the edge of a grove in the opposite direction. The officer had lost his tin hat in his flight and was cursing his luck bitterly.

"The chin-strap broke," said he. "Did you ever hear of such a thing? It was a British helmet anyway, so it's not much loss; but it's rather inconvenient right now. I wonder if there's gas in these woods."

Eadie sniffed.

"Might be. Gas hangs around woods

much longer than it does out in the open. We'd better be moving before they discover us."

"Would that wonderful watch of yours help us to locate that machine gun?"

"I doubt it," said Eadie sadly, "but I could have found where the shells were coming from if I'd had time."

They went deeper into the woods, and Eadie stumbled and fell over a machine gun, carefully concealed under some brush.

"It's a Hotchkiss," cried the officer, "and there's the gunner, poor lad. Is he dead?"

Eadie regarded a soldier lying face down.

"I'll say he is; and he's begun to decay, too! Wow!"

The telephone man wrinkled his nose.

"Le's go away from here," he pleaded. "Le's get some fresh air."

The dead man sat up suddenly.

"Whadda —— 'scominoff?" he muttered sleepily.

Then as he became fully awakened he did three things that a soldier of experience did when awakened suddenly on the front. He looked for his rations, looked at the uniform of the men that had awakened him and thought of an alibi for being asleep. In this case the man on the ground became excited when he looked at the place where he had put his food. Also he swore terribly when he looked at Eadie.

"Look at what you done," he complained. "You went and busted my cheese. Look at it all over your arm."

Eadie raised his arm; and there, on the under part of his sleeve, was a white substance well buttered up and down. An odor of ancient carrion arose. Eadie spoke a word made famous by another soldier at Waterloo.

"No wonder I thought you had begun to decay," said he and began to hunt for a stick to clean his sleeve with.

He did not join in the hearty laughter of his companions.

"What outfit are you with?" the infantry officer asked the gloomy machine-gunner.

The machine-gunner told him.

"But this isn't your sector," said the officer. "You're too far over to the right. Where's the rest of your outfit?"

"What's left of the platoon is down there in a farm-house. We were in some woods when the row started last night, and the captain said we'd better retire, so we retired."

"What made you pick out this place to retire to?"

"I run outta breath," said the gloomy machine-gunner.

"Now let's get this straight," said the officer after a short pause. "You say there's a platoon in a farm-house down the hill?"

"Yessir. They come along this morning and set up this gun, and the sergeant left me here with it. Then they went on. A little while later a guy come up an' said I was to go down an' they'd give me some chow. So I went down, an' they give me some hard bread, and I found a cheese in one o' them rooms. I was gonna eat it for supper, but that guy stuck his arm in it."

"I didn't stick my arm in your cheese," said Eadie. "I fell over your —— —— gun on it. I probably saved your life. If you'd eaten that cheese you'd smothered yourself to death. I'll probably have to bury this blouse."

"Howcome?" cried the telephone man, startled out of his silence. "I never knew you swore, sergeant."

"I didn't use to," said Eadie; "but since this drive started I'm gradually seeing the need of it once in a while."

"Where did the rest of the men go?" asked the officer.

"God knows," replied the telephone man. "I wasn't watching 'em."

"Let's find the Boche," decided the officer, "and then we'll see about getting the information back. What can you see from here to shoot at?"

The machine-gunner pointed. The other three bent over and looked down a tunnel in the underbrush that ended in a field gleaming under the late-afternoon sun.

"Any Boche that crosses that field is dead," added the gunner.

He began to set up the gun that Eadie had fallen over, looking sadly at the wreck of the cheese and the few pieces of hard bread that he had had covered with his haversack. The officer and the other two moved off down the path that the gunner said led to the farm, but the artilleryman turned back.

"Say," he called, "what kind of a cellar has that farm got?"

"'Tain't much of a one," grinned the machine-gunner, "and it's full now."

"Thanks," called back Eadie. "I'll send you up another cheese if I find one."

THEY found the farm without difficulty. It was a very tiny one, probably the house where the superintendent of LaRocque lived. There was a sentinel on guard near the arch under the bell that summoned the workers in the fields to meals, and at his call the garrison crept out of their cellar. They surrounded the three newcomers and made a display of teeth and arms.

"I am the liaison officer of the Steenth Infantry," the infantryman informed them. "We're trying to find out where the enemy is."

"We don't know ourselves," replied the machine sergeant, not at all respectfully.

"Where have you set up your guns?" inquired the officer.

"None of your —— —— business," replied the sergeant.

There was a long pause. Visions of mutiny floated through the officer's mind. There were several drawn pistols in the crowd that their owners made no effort to conceal. It occurred to the officer that these men could kill him and leave his body right there in the yard without the slightest fear of detection. Then Sergeant Eadie spoke.

"Didn't I see you in Brest the time we cleaned out the Trois Pilliers?" he asked the machine-gun sergeant.

"I'll tell the cock-eyed world you did! I know you now. You're outta the 96th Field."

The atmosphere changed instantly. Every one grinned, and pistols were slyly sneaked back into holsters. The sergeant became respectful at once.

"I'm sorry I spoke to the lieutenant like that just now," he said. "We was afraid you were Germans. There's a lot of 'em around the woods in American uniforms. There was a major went down to one of the doughboy trenches this morning and told 'em to surrender, that they didn't have no chance. He'd have got away with it too, only he went into a support trench and the fellers had to go through the fire trench on their way to the river. 'Course they seen all the men in the fire trench still shooting fer ——'s sake, and they jumped on the major's neck. They sent him back through here about noontime with three big husky dust-disturbers guardin' him."

"Have you seen the enemy at all?" asked the officer.

"Just a few. The valley's full of 'em, I guess. We heard a machine gun on our side a few minutes ago."

"They were shooting at us," cried the newcomers with one voice.

"Have you any extra chow?" Eadie asked.

It appeared that they had. The machine-gunners had looted a wrecked ration train, and they presented the artilleryman with a loaf of bread and a can of hash which would do the three men for several meals.

"Let's go," said the infantry officer. "We aren't getting any dope here, and it will be dark before we know it."

"Don't you think one of us ought to stay here?" suggested Eadie.

"What for?"

"Why—er—er—to keep up liaison."

"We can leave the telephone man here," said the officer, "but I must have you with me. This observation post is to be one that is satisfactory to both infantry and artillery, and I don't know anything about artillery."

"How does it happen they didn't send an artillery officer?"

"He might get killed."

They walked on in silence after that, Eadie raging inwardly, for he had hoped to be left at the farm, where he could dive into the cellar and sleep peacefully until morning with no one to say him nay. They encountered several groups of soldiers in the woods, men from nearly every infantry regiment in the division, disorganized, scattered, having no idea of where they were nor of where any one else was, some with food and some without, but all with the same idea—to dig in and kill every German they saw as long as they were left alive. Some of them reported encounters with German patrols.

It seemed that the main body of the enemy was in the bottom of the Surmelin Valley or on the east slope, and that the west slope was being combed by scouts and small bodies of infantry. There was no shelling going on here at all, which would indicate that there were enemy troops about, who were out of touch with their own artillery.

"Let's go over to that next bunch of trees," suggested Eadie. "It's on a spur, and we can crawl out and get a fine view up and down the valley. We'll never get anywhere talking to these dumb-bells."

"I should say that this division was pretty well shot to ——," said the officer, scratching his head. "Let's hope there aren't any Boche in these woods."

The three men were three-quarters of the way to the woods when they heard a gentle whispering. They took up the double time without command and dived into the sheltering brush.

"Were them bullets?" gasped the telephone man.

"They were," answered the officer. "They were pretty nearly spent, so it's my guess that they came from across the valley."

The woods they were in stretched clear down the side of the hill to the bottom of the valley, and south an unguessable distance. They could see the upper end of the valley and the lower end where the Surmelin entered the Marne, but the bottom of the valley was hidden.

"We can't do anything more in daylight," said the officer. "We'll only get ourselves bumped off; so let's wait until dark, and maybe you can get some of that sleep you hanker for."

SO THEY opened the can of hash and cut the bread and prepared to pass the time as best they might until nightfall.

Slowly and slowly the darkness settled upon the battle. In other wars the coming of night put an end to the fighting, and the opposing armies would sleep upon their arms; but in this one the night meant a renewal of activity. Darkness furnished concealment, and troops could be moved with greater safety.

As the light waned, so did Sergeant Eadie's courage depart from him. It was not so bad to run about the fields in broad day, sleepless and hungry though he had been. But when night fell a nameless horror descended upon him—a horror of the clanging shells and the rattling of rifle and machine-gun fire and the black, black woods.

He thought of the dead that lay unburied and horrible along the river bank and of the wounded in cellar and ditch, waiting patiently for the ambulances to take them back to comfort and rest. No ambulances that day, nor the next either. Anything that moved must be destroyed, and the enemy was no respecter of ambulances.

Suppose that, he, Sergeant Eadie, should be hit and left to die like the man he had seen in the ditch that morning, that had had his heel shot off? Or like the man that sat on the box in the woods with his lungs oozing out through his O. D. shirt? Or like the men he had seen in the icy cellar of LaRocque, lying there in the dripping darkness so silently? Suppose morning found him thus, or a prisoner? If the enemy had taken Courboin, then there could be no escape.

Hunger and cold and terror, and at home people were going out now to the beaches and dance-halls and theaters, reveling in the Summer's night, laughing and talking and totally unaware that across the sea men were laying down their lives to save the world. At this exalting thought the sergeant wept.

"What are you so thoughtful about?" inquired the officer.

"I was thinking what a —— fool I was to enlist in a fighting outfit," replied Eadie. "I could have picked some other just as well, but I didn't have brains enough."

"How's your courage?"

"My courage is all right, but I'm about all in. I've been running around these fields now since eleven o'clock last night, when this parade began."

"Well, cheer up. I'll see if I can't get you a little sleep after a while."

"Yeh," said the sergeant. "All I need is a little sleep and I'll be all right."

His new watch told him that it was eight o'clock.

"Let's be going," said the officer, getting up; and then very cautiously they began to work their way down the slope of the hill.

It was very dark in the woods, and the path they followed quite narrow and steep. They gave no thought to what they should do when they found the enemy, nor how they should get their information back. Find the Huns first and then see about reporting it.

Once the telephone man who brought up the rear caught Eadie by the blouse, and the two of them stopped dead. The officer, sensing the disturbance, turned around and halted also. They listened, shaking their heads to clear their ears of the pounding of their arteries. Some one was coming down the path in back of them.

They decamped into the undergrowth at once and waited. Eadie cautiously drew his pistol and breathed a prayer that it was loaded. He did not know whether it was or not, and he dared not draw back the slide to make sure. The clumping steps drew nearer, the men beside the path could hear grunts, the creaking of leather and the soft clink of metal.

Men went by on the path, bits of blackness blacker than the trees, seven or eight of them. It was impossible to tell to what army they belonged, impossible to see anything except a passing shadow. They went by so near that the watchers could hear their breathing.

The passing men had come from the direction of the American lines, so that they might be Americans. On the other hand, the telephone detail had been shot up from somewhere in that same neighborhood that afternoon, so that the strangers might be an enemy machine-gun crew.

Anyway let them go. The three were looking for Germans, not Americans; and if the men on the path were Germans, eight to three was too many. Heavy odds are all right in romantic novels; but a man who really stakes his life on the outcome of a scrap is not very keen about taking on too many antagonists.

It began to rain, the heavy drops pattering among the leaves. Shells began to fall below them quick and fast. Some of them sounded like great balls thundering down a bowling-alley, with a clatter of falling pins at the end, as if the invisible player had made a strike. Others struck thickly, like a trunk dumped on a sidewalk. Some sounded like distant doors slamming.

A squadron of planes, high among the stars, droned by, going toward the American lines.

"Boche bombers," thought Eadie. "They're flying so high."

The rain grew heavier. Eadie shifted his pistol to keep it as dry as possible and halted in surprize. His blouse was perfectly dry. He put his hand on his helmet. Dry as a bone.

The telephone man, coming down the path in the dark, collided with Eadie and gave a gasping cough.

"I'm hit," he said in a frightened voice and dropped.

"You aren't hit," said Eadie. "You bumped into me."

He felt around to assist the other man to his feet.

"Don't make so much racket," whispered the officer, hurrying back at the sound of their voices. "You'll have the whole German army down on us! Don't talk out loud any more."

"The telephone man is hit," said Eadie. "I think we're getting some indirect machine gun. Hear it?"

Patter-patter-patter like rain, save that there were little ticking sounds where the bullets clipped the trees.

"Where is he?"

The officer bent over, groping.

"——!" he muttered.

"I put my hand in it, too," remarked Eadie. "I'll tell the bang-toed world he's hit."

"Get his first-aid packet," said the officer nervously. "Let's do him up; we can't let him bleed to death! Never mind; I've got it."

There was the rasp of ripping tin as the officer pulled off the seal of the tin box that held two bandages.

Eadie began to quiver and shake. That poor man on the ground had been hit within two inches of the sergeant. Suppose another bullet wandered that way? He replaced his pistol and dropped to his knees, groping in the darkness for the wounded man. If he was doing something, only holding the telephone man's hand, he would have no time to think of his own troubles.

The wound was on the right leg. The bullet must have glanced from a tree-trunk and gone downward, for the wounded man bled near the hip and inside his leg just above the knee. Blood flowed from him seemingly by the gallon. They put a tourniquet on and tightened it with the wounded man's pistol barrel.

"How bad is it?" he asked.

"Not much," said the officer. "It knocked the skin off a little, that's all."

"It hurts pretty bad," said the man on the ground.

"It'll be all right in a minute," the sergeant assured him. "I didn't know you were hit. I thought you just bumped into me."

"I felt it sting me just after I hit you."

The officer finished the tourniquet and stood up.

"What are you goin' to do with me?" asked the wounded man.

"We'll send some one out after you the first place we come to."

"How they goin' to find me?"

"You'll be right alongside the path. We'll tell them where the place is; they won't have any trouble."

"I think it's a —— of a trick to go off and leave a man in the dark after he's been hit. I didn't want to come with you anyway. I ain't no —— —— scout. I'm a wire-stringer."

The man's voice was growing weaker, and a note of stark terror had crept into it.

"We can't take you, old boy," said Eadie, patting what he hoped was the other man's shoulder. "We don't know where we're going. The Boche may gather us in any minute."

"Keep a stiff upper lip," the officer said. "We'll have you on your way to a hospital in no time. Come on, sergeant!"

They went off with the wounded man begging them weakly to stay. Eadie's heart was torn with pity for the poor lad, but there was nothing to do but to leave him. If they carried him he would only bleed the more; and where would they take him to? To be left alone in the woods with the enemy's bullets whipping through the leaves and one's life-blood draining away is a hard fate. It is even harder on the men who must leave their comrade there, especially if they are gifted, as Eadie was, with a vivid imagination.

A sudden shot from behind them.

"What the —— was that?" the two men asked each other in consternation.

"That was an American pistol," said Eadie.

Each knew what was in the other's mind, yet neither dared speak his thought.

"Oh, God!" said the officer softly. "Oh, God!"

They continued to descend the hill and spoke no more to each other.

* * *

AS THE sergeant stumbled along down the path it came upon him that this was a real, real war. The possibility that the Germans might win had never entered his head; but after he had seen the destruction wrought by the bombardment of the night before and had become acquainted with the savage, thorough, business-like manner in which the enemy made war, he began to have his doubts.

It came upon him that his country might have bitten off more than it could chew. Flesh and blood could not long withstand the shock of the continuous attacks of the Germans. The tremendous force that had launched that terrible bombardment of the night before, that had scattered the infantry and machine-gunners far and wide, that had crossed troops by the thousand over a river that every one had believed impassable, that was even now shooting and banging down the valley in the rear of the Americans—that force seemed irresistible.

There were too many Germans. Here was one American division, supported by nothing, behind it but a few French territorials and some shallow trenches. Against it the Germans had brought up some eight or ten divisions, the flower of their army.

The French were licked. The Yanks were licked. Eadie was licked. Well, so be it; he had neither chick nor child; his father and mother had another son not of military age to comfort them; and he, Sergeant Eadie of A Battery, would take a few Germans to —— with him anyway. He felt much cheered at this last thought and went forward almost with eagerness, loosening his pistol in its holster.

Abruptly they found themselves on the edge of the woods. A level field stretched before them, gray under the stars. In the center of the field, a square, black bulk, threatening, mysterious, was a great stone farm. The two men lay down where the trees ended and tried to see some indication of life, some sign by which they might know whether friend or enemy held the buildings.

"What farm is it?" Eadie whispered.

"I don't know," said the officer. "This is out of my regiment's sector. We must be near the bottom of the valley now."

"That's the road out there. I can see it gleaming," answered the sergeant.

"Let's reconnoiter," suggested the officer. "You strike for the south corner, and I'll go around the north side. Listen for voices. If we can hear them talking we'll know whether they're Germans or Americans."

They began to crawl forward. As if a dog had winded them there was the sudden barking of a machine gun. With drumming arteries they listened. The gun stopped. The officer crawled over and whispered in the sergeant's ear:

"They aren't shooting at us; the firing is in the other direction. You can't hear any bullets going over."

"That's a German gun, though," answered Eadie. "Notice how fast it fired?"

"That's right, too," agreed the officer. "Ours don't shoot as fast as that, do they? Well, let's proceed."

"Proceed? What more do you want than a German gun firing? They'll grab us off, surer than ——!"

"How do you know where that gun was? Are you sure it wasn't in the field?"

"It was in the farm; there's not the slightest doubt of it."

"Well, we'll know for certain in a few minutes. Let's separate now, and you go your way and I'll go mine. Don't wait too long on the other side. I might meet with an accident. In case I do, I look to you to carry on. Don't go back until you find out if the Surmelin Valley is held in force or not. Good luck."

Then the two separated.

"Deliver me," thought Eadie, "from these embryonic-brained officers that thirst to be killed. I don't care if he gets himself ruined; but why does he drag me?"

Here in honor of the many years that he had refrained from profanity he indulged in a little monolog, rolling the words under his tongue and repeating many that he had heard his first sergeant use on occasions when a gun or wagon had bogged down on the road, or when at the end of a night march the major had issued orders that the horses be watered before the battery went to sleep.

The sergeant had kept his head down as low as he could while he crept along, so that he had reached the wall of the farm in an amazingly short time. There was no sound from that blackness of stone. He crept along farther, looking for a window or a door, expecting every minute to be challenged in a strange tongue or to have a German bayonet inserted among his ribs.

Suddenly he stopped. There was what he was looking for. In the wall, at about the height of a man's shoulders from the ground, was a small, barred window, barely a foot square. Thanking his guardian angel that there was no moon, Eadie raised himself cautiously until he was just below the level of the window. He listened, straining his ears. From the other side of the farm the machine gun barked with that coughing rattle, that metallic gasp that a machine gun has when one is very near it.

When it was silent the sergeant listened again. There was somebody in there. Eadie could hear a moving about. Soft whisperings, then a gentle grunt. Then another grunt that had something of pleading in it.

"Ugh!"

Impatient this time.

"A crap-game, sure enough!" thought Eadie joyfully.

Then, not so joyfully, he wondered if maybe the Germans didn't shoot craps too. Why not? But did they grunt when they rolled? There was no snapping of fingers, no prayers to be shown the number of days in the week nor reminders that baby needed shoes. Just the soft grunts, and—now that he listened for it—a gentle clicking.

Hark! Some one was coming around the corner of the farm. Eadie leaped into the grass and flattened himself on the ground as two men came by, coming from the front of the building. They moved slowly and cautiously, mere blobs of shadow against the gray wall.

"He must be around here," said one. "I don't think he'd stay out in the field and not come in."

"Maybe he's hit," said the other.

Eadie discovered himself.

"There he is," cried one, who proved to be the infantry liaison officer. "It's all right, sergeant," he continued. "This is an American post. We're all right. I've talked with some of the men."

Again the machine gun did its bit.

"Where's that gun?" inquired the artilleryman nervously.

"Make yuh jumpy?" asked the third man. "Don't let it bother yuh; it's one we took off the Jerries this morning. We got it playing on the road out there."

"What's the name of this farm?" asked the officer.

"I dunno," said the other.

"Do you know the name of the nearest town?" inquired Eadie.

"St. Eugene. It's about a half-mile down the road toward the Marne."

"St. Eugene," repeated Eadie. "Then this farm is either Prè aux Clercs or Janvier. How come you're back so far?"

"Well, we fell back a little about sunset."

"It's lucky you didn't hurt yourselves. Three miles is quite a fall."

The only reply made to this was a snort.

The foregoing conversation, it must be

understood, was carried on in hoarse whispers, while the officer beat his brow and tried to decide what to do next.

"Are there many Boche around?" he asked the soldier from the farm.

"I hope to spit in your mess-kit there are. They're gone clean on up the valley. But they ain't one of 'em gone along that road either way since we was here, not for sour owl-guts there ain't."

"Let's go back in," said the officer and led the way to the gate of the farm.

THE farm-house was solidly built of stone, the living-quarters on one side and the stables, sheds, etc. on the other three sides of a quadrangle. There was a manure pile in the center of the yard and a well in the center of the pile.

Eadie could see a small piece of board hanging to the well, probably an *Eau Potable* sign, meaning that the water was drinkable. The Americans were allowed to drink no water but from the water-carts, which had been treated with chlorin; but the French seemed to be allowed to drink anything. In case of a siege the garrison might be driven to drinking water from that well.

The machine gun was set up in the kitchen and was firing intermittently at the road. It appeared that the men in the farm-house were part of a regiment of infantry that had been badly mauled in the morning. These men had been in reserve and had been brought up only to find themselves cut off from the front by a considerable number of the enemy. They had slowly retreated during the afternoon and had surprized and taken a German machine gun, which was now being used against its former owners.

There were twenty-two men in the farm-house, with one officer, a captain. This last appeared from somewhere and fell on the neck of Eadie's lieutenant, for they were old friends and had put each other to bed many a time and oft.

"Is the valley held in force?" asked the lieutenant.

"Don't know," said the captain. "Hardly think so. The regiments at the head of the valley must still be holding, else we'd had them pour in here long ago. There is a very strong force south of us though. We've been watching their rockets. They came down from the east side, through the French positions, and some of their patrols have been running around the woods.

"There are machine guns to the west. We heard them firing this afternoon. Shouldn't wonder if they tried to dig us out of here before morning. Do you want to look around and see how we're organized?"

"Surely. Come on, sergeant. After we get the lay of things here you find a place to sleep, and I'll see if I can see anything more. Then we'll try to get back. If we make it before daylight it will be time enough. We can't pick out an O. P., tonight anyway."

They went into the large room on the ground floor of the farm that had been used as general living-room and kitchen. The captured German gun was in there, firing through a hole that a shell had conveniently knocked in the wall.

Three scarecrows sat on the floor on blankets, their uniforms in shreds. When it was time to fire, one would press the thumb-pieces, the other would see that the belt fed properly and the third would peer through the window to see where the bursts were going. After the road had been hammered for about twenty seconds the gunners would relax stiffly and lie down on their blankets again.

"How's your ammunition?" asked the liaison officer.

"*Bukkoo*," answered the captain.

"Think they'll rush you?"

"Doubt it. Probably try to shell us out first. Knock the place down around our ears."

They went out into the courtyard again, and Eadie looked up at the silent, peaceful stars. Those same stars were shining down on his home. He sighed heavily, so heavily that the liaison officer heard it.

"Beat it, sergeant," he ordered. "Go to bed. I'll call you when I want you."

Eadie returned to the kitchen and approached the men about the silent gun.

"Do you suppose I could lie down in here and get a little sleep?" he asked. "I haven't had any sleep for two nights, and I'm a little poobed."

"You don't want to sleep here," answered one of them. "There's a better place than this. The gun would keep you awake."

"I doubt it," answered the sergeant. "Gabriel himself could blow reveille and I wouldn't hear him once I got to sleep."

"Naw, I wouldn't sleep here," spoke up another man. "Some one might drop a watermelon on this house any minute.

Fritz ain't gonna let us blow beans at his road all night without lettin' us know he's sore. Whyncha go over in the carriage-house? There's a lotta guys sleepin' over there."

"Where's that?"

"Take him over, Shorty," said the man who seemed to be in command. "Got any blankets? No? Give him some o' those in the corner there. We're goin' to put 'em up for gas defense when we get time."

Eadie and his guide started across the court; then Eadie raised an objection.

"I bet I know where we're going. There's a crap game going on in there. Nix. I must have sleep. No dominoes galloping across the floor all night."

"Probably is a little shootin'. We only got paid day 'fore yesterday. Probably it's some o' the champeens decidin' whose to have all the outfit's money. Two or three guys gets it all, you know, within twenty-four hours after pay-day. Well, how'd you like to try the cellar?"

"Lead me there."

"They wake guys up there every hour. We got patrols goin' round, and a new one starts out just as soon as one comes in. The Old Man ain't takin no chances."

"They won't bother me. Come on; show it to me, or I'll be asleep standing up."

They went down into the stone vault where the former tenants of the farm had stored their wine. It was dimly lighted by two or three candles, and three men were going about among the sleepers on the floor.

"Patrol's goin' out," explained the sergeant's guide.

One of the three turned his flashlight on a sleeper.

"Here's one," he said. "Let's get him up."

The other two men tore the blankets from the sleeping man, and the three of them fell to kicking him savagely. He gave no heed. They picked him up and slammed him down on the hard floor again. He was as lifeless as a sack of oats.

"Up with him," said one.

The three seized the sleeper and jerked him to his feet. Then while two held him upright and dragged him up and down the floor the third booted him from the rear, not gently but vigorously, with the knee. The sleeper gasped, opened his eyes and glared wildly about, then with a strangled shriek made to leap on his tormentors.

"Steady! Hold everything! You're all right now, Tommy. You're all right. It's time to go on patrol. Steady now; we ain't Germans!"

Tommy came to himself, rubbed his eyes, and straightened his belt and helmet.

"Give us a hand with these others," said the man who had the flashlight, and Tommy lent his aid to awaken the rest of the patrol.

Eadie spread his blankets in a corner and watched while three more men were awakened. One they shook back and forth until it seemed as if his arms must part company with his body. Another wakened at the first kick, and they sighed thankfully. The third they beat and kicked until they were weary, but he would not come to.

"D'yuh suppose he's dead?" asked one of the awakeners.

"He might be," said the man with the flashlight and bent over the prostrate man to make sure whether he was alive or dead.

The man on the floor reached suddenly up and seized the examiner by the throat, nor did he let go until his victim's tongue hung out and all the rest of the patrol had pried the two apart. These men, sleepless for two days and a night, utterly worn out with the strain and fatigue of their first battle, went to their hard beds with the thought of the enemy in their minds, burned there with fire and blood. They fell into a death-like slumber; and after they had been beaten back to consciousness their first thought was that the enemy was upon them.

"They'd better not try to wake me up like that," muttered Eadie, "or there'll be some more casualties in this outfit."

Then he was instantly asleep.

MEANWHILE the captain had taken the liaison officer to a window high under the eaves to show him a fireworks display that was being held at the upper end of the valley. Quite a way to the south numbers of star shells were bursting, hanging in the air like the arc lights on a city boulevard. Occasional colored rockets went up. It was here that the shells were doing their clanging.

"Is that Courboin?" asked the liaison officer.

"Further than that—Condé-en-Brie. The drive is going the other way, to the east toward Montmirail."

"Well," said the liaison officer sadly, "I suppose you and I will get a free trip to Germany tomorrow."

"——, no! That's a local action going on down there. Fritz can't go very far as long as we are on his flank like this. Our infantry still holds the Fossoy Road. Salient's too deep now. Can't keep up the service of supply if the depth of the salient is greater than the breadth at the mouth. All explained in the book. Simple enough. Some night, perhaps tonight, Foch will pinch the neck. Then where are they with a couple of million men in our end of the salient?"

"All of which is very comforting; but what's to prevent a company of Huns from coming down off the hill and capturing this farm?"

"Perfectly possible. They won't, though; wouldn't do 'em any good."

They went down again and went out through a room where seven or eight men slept very quietly.

"It's funny that some one isn't snoring in that bunch," remarked the liaison officer. "I never saw soldiers sleeping before without some one ripping off a few."

"All dead," said the captain. "Picked 'em up in the field, on the road; some of 'em my men. Huns did some sniping from across the valley while it was light enough to see."

"By ——!" cried the liaison officer. "I forgot! Have you got any medical corps men around here? I left a man up the hill a ways, and I promised to go out and get him. I think he shot himself—we heard a shot shortly after we left him—but I'm going to see anyway."

"Haven't any medical corps; but I've got a stretcher and a couple of men."

"Good enough; I'll go right away."

The stretcher and two gloomy men emerged from the darkness in a few minutes, and the liaison officer led the way out of the farm. The three of them crept very cautiously across the field and when they reached the shelter of the woods stood up. The officer hunted a while for the path, finally found it and started up, going very slowly and pausing to listen every few steps. Strangely enough, he felt more nervous than he had earlier in the evening when he was coming down the path. The back of his neck kept tingling.

Finally he drew his revolver and tried to pull himself together. This thing was unbearable; he mustn't give way like that. The two soldiers shared his feelings, for he could hear their quick panting.

"Come on," said the officer and jumped at the sound of his own voice. "Let's keep going; we aren't there yet."

"No, I wouldn't go any farther," came a reply from beside the path. "You've gone quite far enough. Every one of you is covered."

"Don't be an ass," said the officer. "We're Americans."

"I know you are," was the mocking reply. "We're Germans."

The officer's gun roared, the stretcher clattered to the ground and there was a great deal of straining and grunting. A grenade burst with a terrific crash. A grenade packs a lot of meanness for such a small thing. Silence ensued until some one began to swear terribly in German.

"What —— swine threw that grenade?" inquired the profane one. "What for a dumb-head! ——!" he continued in English. "No wonder we can't get anywhere with such a lot of idiots. Now that will be the end of using this path tonight."

He switched to German again.

"Have we any wounded? Let me speak to the prisoners."

"Two wounded have we, my lieutenant, and one dead, who threw the grenade. Also one of the Americans is wounded by the burst."

"Let me see him."

The German officer took off his helmet and turned a flashlight on the American under its shelter.

"What!" he ejaculated. "I would have had you earlier in the evening, lieutenant, only the man you left behind fired his pistol at us and kept us from jumping on your backs. I've been chasing you ever since you went into the woods up there."

"That other man—is he alive?" asked the American officer weakly.

"Hardly. One can not use a pistol to stop bleeding and shoot with it at the same time. I fancy he bled to death. He has been very quiet. To continue, how many men are in that farm?"

The American whispered something.

"Speak louder," said the German, bending over him. "I can't hear you."

Again a whisper, and the American's eyes began to turn up their whites under the glare of the flashlight. The German officer put his ear down to the wounded man's lips.

"How many did you say?" he cried impatiently.

The American summoned his last strength.

"Go jump in the lake!" he said quite clearly, and died.

The German raged. He had posted himself with his patrol beside the path to intercept any one going into or leaving the farm, and the same firing that had wounded the telephone man had hit one of the Germans. He had been prevented from capturing Eadie and the liaison officer before because he believed the telephone man had given the alarm. Now the American officer was dead, and the fact that the path was watched was well advertised by the firing and the grenade bursting.

He questioned the two soldiers who had carried the stretcher, but they swore that they knew nothing of the farm's garrison. One guessed that it held a division, the other that there was "a couple of regiments in there anyway."

In answer to the German's inquiry as to who was the commanding officer, one said General Pershing and the other Corporal Sheahy, so the officer gave up in disgust and sent the two men off, with a husky German to take them back to the *Kommandantur* for a more exhaustive examination. Some time later in the night, or rather early the next morning, two Yanks, one bearing a German pistol and the other a helmet, turned in at Grèves Farm and went pleasantly to sleep. It is not known whether these were the same two or not. Meanwhile the German patrol went elsewhere, seeking prisoners and information.

Thirty minutes later Eadie awakened in the cellar of the farm. His first conscious impression was that he was standing upright and that a man had him by each arm.

"Hold on!" cried the artilleryman. "Careful! Careful! you'll break my new watch! it's all right! I'm awake!"

"It's —— near time," grunted one of the men that held him.

"I thought you might be going to knock me for a goal to wake me up," grinned Eadie, "but I saved you the trouble."

The two regarded him by the tiny beam of a flashlight.

"You wasn't no trouble to get up," said one sarcastically. "We been workin' on you for twenty minutes. If I hadn't thought to wallop you with my pistol belt you'd been dead to the world yet."

The sergeant felt of himself.

"I'm wrong," he remarked, fingering a number of sore places he had discovered. "I'm just about skinned alive."

"Come out," said the other. "The Old Man wants to see you."

The captain stood in the shadow of the gate.

"Sergeant," he said, "that officer of yours went out some time ago to get a wounded man. There's been firing up where he went. Think he got into a scrap. We're going up to find out. Know where that wounded man was?"

"Yessir!"

"Show us. Come on, men."

Ten doughboys, their bayonets glinting in the starlight, arose from the shadows and followed the captain.

"Good-by, sleep," thought the artilleryman.

He took his place beside the captain and described as well as he could just where the telephone man had been left.

"We'll go up another way and come at it down hill," decided the captain. "Probably a gang watching the path. We'll fox 'em. Come on!"

THEY crawled across the field to the far corner. Here a tiny ravine wound its way upward. A sign on a tree pointed a finger and bore the words, *Pointe d'eau*, showing that there was a well or a spring at the top of the path. The doughboys moved cautiously up the path about a yard apart, crouching low and listening every few yards.

Then something happened to Eadie that made him exceedingly wroth. The fastening tape of his puttee loosened, and his puttee came down about his ankle. He knelt down while the men filed by him and hurriedly tried to bind up his leg again. He was so nervous and his hand had so many thumbs that it was a much longer job than it should have been.

Just as he got to his feet once more he heard a shout from ahead and the one word—

"Boche!"

Bang! went a rifle, then a number of joyous whoops. A deep-lunged voice roared:

"Cut out that firing; use the bayonet! Eat 'em up, boys! Bayonets! Bayonets!"

Eadie hastened up the path at the top of his speed, drawing his pistol as he ran. He tripped over something at about the fourth jump and went sprawling. Two men leaped upon him and ground his face into the dirt.

"Get off me, you —— —— fools," said the sergeant in a stifled voice. "I'm an American."

His riders, however, were apparently taking no chances. They held him all the tighter. Some one, drawn by the sound of the sergeant's complaints, appeared.

"What regiment are you from?" inquired the newcomer.

"The 96th Field," replied Eadie indignantly.

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm trying to find a location for an O.P."

"Have you been in the farm tonight?"

"Yessir."

"How many men are in it?"

"About fifteen. Let me up, will you? What's the idea of sitting on my head?"

"I don't believe you. The farm is a regimental command post and must have more than fifteen men in it."

"It isn't. There's a captain in command."

There was a long pause; then the questioner pulled the two men from Eadie's back.

"Get up," he said. "You are an American, all right."

Eadie stood up. It was dark as a wolf's belly there, but he could hear breathing about him.

"You guys are too wild and woolly," he remarked. "You didn't need to break my back."

He listened to his watch and found it still ticking.

"Who do you think you are—Bill Hart?" he continued. "I lost my gun, too."

He listened to where the cries and shouting were still going on.

"I see 'em! This way, men!"

"They went down the other way; they beat it!"

"Who's got the gun?"

"Go get 'em, fellers; go get 'em!"

And the loudest of all:

"When do we eat? Yaaah!"

"Let's get into that," said Eadie and started off.

He ran against a man who barred his way. Instantly his nose registered a peculiar smell, a smell of chemical filth, a smell of disinfected rottenness. His outstretched hand met an arm and closed convulsively. He felt buttons. Buttons! On a Yank sleeve! That stink! Buttons! JERRIES!

"Hey!" shouted the sergeant at the top of his lungs and swung his fist wildly.

It met something. The sergeant started to run, his captors meanwhile bumping against each other in their efforts to seize him. One of them fell against the back of Eadie's legs, and the American went down, cursing most frightfully.

Instantly they were all upon him; and only their numbers saved Eadie from being kicked to death right there, for the Germans that covered his body received the kicks and blows that were meant for him. Someone pried the pile apart, much as a football official does after a line buck, and addressed the breathless artilleryman.

"If you make a sound again, young man, so will I blow off the top of your head. You are a prisoner, —— your eyes, and let you not forget it."

"You speak pretty good English," said Eadie inanely.

"I ought to," replied the German. "I lived in Chicago twenty years."

They sat a while, listening to the hooting growing fainter and fainter up hill, while Eadie debated what the chances were on getting away. Inasmuch as one man held him by the wrist on one side and another kept a pistol tightly pressed to the back of his neck, they appeared to be small. The Germans had done quite a bit of active moving around that night, and their native odor was not that of apple-blossoms.

"I bet you birds haven't had a bath since 1914," remarked the artilleryman.

This secured the sergeant a guttural order, or a curse, and a back-handed crack in the mouth that split his lip and loosened some of his teeth, so thereafter he held his peace.

After a time there was a muttered order in German, and the sergeant's captors dragged him to his feet. Then the whole party started off down-hill, bearing to the north to give the farm a wide berth.

They crossed the road and mounted the hill on the other side. Then they stopped a moment to catch their breath.

Eadie, almost dead from fatigue, threw himself flat on the ground. So this was the end of his military career! A prisoner, and an unnecessary one at that! To be grabbed the way he had, and then to spill all he knew, too!

For a moment he thought of making a break for safety and risking all on the chance of his guard not being able to hit him in the dark. He cautiously raised his head and bumped his nose on a pistol barrel. No, that plan would not do.

One cheering thought remained, one gleam of light in the darkness that enveloped his soul. Perhaps when they got to wherever they were taking him they would let him go to sleep.

THEY began to pass more Germans now, and Eadie could hear machine guns going all about him. The enemy was keeping up a steady fire on the hills and that portion of the valley that the Americans still held. There was considerable shelling, so that the sergeant had the gloomy prospect of being killed by one of his own shells.

They passed a great many walking wounded and others being wheeled along in a kind of stretcher on wheels. It would seem that the enemy's advance was costing him dear. An entire regiment went by, going toward the new front.

Eadie had that same numb feeling that comes to a man the first hour or so after he has been wounded, the consciousness that something terrible has happened but no real indication of what that something is. He was sick anyway, and hungry, and tired unto death, so that he staggered in his walk like a drunken man. It really mattered nothing to him what happened.

His captors quickened their pace, and Eadie had a hard time to keep up. After a time they rested again, waiting for some shelling to stop so that they could still follow the road. Then they went on again, down the hill into the cold mists of the valley.

Here was activity indeed. Shells were pattering like rain on a tin roof. There was continuous drumming of machine guns and faint shouting from the direction of Fossoy. The German patrol and their prisoner ducked into a little town, probably Mézy, and tumbled down-stairs into a basement. From the lower end of the town came the brazen clanging of a gas signal.

The basement had well-blanketed windows and was brightly lighted with a profusion of candles. Candles were a rarity to the invaders, and they had stuck in every conceivable place one of the ample store they had captured from the Americans.

The room was almost as bright as day. It had been used by the Americans as a regimental or battalion P.C. before its capture by the enemy, for French maps still hung on the wall and the old signs were over the various tables: Intelligence Officer—Adjutant—Comd'g Officer.

Two large chromos of General Pershing and Marshal Foch were undisturbed. It would appear that the Germans had been very busy since they had taken up their quarters there—too busy to remove the portraits of their enemies.

The American then got his first look at the men that had captured him. Only two of them besides the officer had come in, both very solemn and tired-looking. The officer was dressed no differently from the other two, except that his boots were better fitting than theirs and he had very narrow silver shoulder-straps. Eadie noted for future reference that the privates' shoulder-straps were blue, with a red bomb and the figure 6 on them, by which tokens he believed them to be members of the 6th Grenadier Guards.

In the cellar were seven or eight other officers and some non-coms, all very earnestly bent over their respective tables. The officer who had captured Eadie halted before one of the desks and went through a little heel-clicking.

The man whom he addressed was about forty-five years of age, very heavily built, with a high, square forehead and an undershot jaw. Like the rest, he wore the rough field gray of the enlisted man with officers' straps.

He was not very well satisfied with the other officer's report. He barked and grunted, and the other explained and alibied. He was probably telling how he had almost captured the infantry liaison officer and claiming that if the morale of his patrol hadn't been wrecked when he had been shot up by his own machine gun he would have captured the farm.

However, he had not come back empty-handed, but had penetrated the enemy lines to such a depth that he had been able to take a non-commissioned officer of artillery prisoner. Here he turned with a dramatic gesture to Eadie, standing silently between his captors, thinking of soap-factories and fertilizer-plants.

The older officer called for some one. The younger expressed his willingness to serve as interpreter, but the older man wanted to get the story through a disinterested medium. A fat-faced, pompadoured man, the white binding on his collar showing non-commissioned rank, very pompously appeared and acted as if some one had suddenly dropped a piece of ice down his back.

Eadie noticed that none of these men did any saluting. They looked one another in the eye and threw out their chests, at the same time banging their heels together. The young officer withdrew after a tongue-lashing had been administered, and the fat-faced man drew himself up preparatory to questioning the sergeant.

There was a sudden clatter at the door, and a man dashed in. He tore off his gas mask, stuck out his chest and imparted some news. There was a murmur from the company in the cellar, and every one began to straighten the papers on the desks. The officer in command had barely finished smoothing down his hair when the door opened again, and one entered who might have been the All Highest himself.

The newcomer paused, removed his gas mask with an air and bowed stiffly. The men in the cellar, who had leaped to their feet when the door opened, resumed their seats.

Eadie could not determine the newcomer's rank. He was tall and gray-haired. His shiny boots were spotless, and he wore a tight gray blouse that fitted him as if he had been poured into it. It had very glittering buttons and some gold dewdads on the high collar.

The officer wore no decorations but the ribbon of the iron cross through his buttonhole and a leather cord about his neck. This had a monocle on the end of it, through which the officer regarded the company. He was perhaps a chief of brigade, come over to see how things were going.

The newly arrived officer and the one who had been about to question Eadie conversed at some length. The shiny one removed his jaunty cap, revealing a long scar above one eye, and lighted a cigaret. The candle light flashed from his monocle as he moved his head from side to side. Here indeed was a Prussian.

The monocle came suddenly to bear upon Eadie, and its wearer gave an order. The fat-faced man, who still stood by, stepped forward, then turned to Eadie and announced—

"You must be searched!"

One of Eadie's guards did the searching and handed what he found to the pompous non-com., who placed the objects before the two officers. A bag of Bull Durham, a watch-case compass, a knife, a small map of the sector, a diary—this was eagerly seized, but Eadie had not kept it up since he had been on the front—a bandanna handkerchief, five bullets for a forty-five, an indelible pencil and a franc piece. Lastly they removed Eadie's watch from his pocket, so that he felt as if his heart had been lifted from his bosom.

Eadie looked sorrowfully at his watch, while the officers turned over his other treasures. It lay there, ticking bravely, its silver case gleaming in the candle light. What would the poor sergeant have to tell him the hour during the long days in the prison camp? His aunt had never thought that she was really making a present to the enemy when she had sent him the watch. Eadie wished it had been broken by the shell that had shattered the rest of his birthday box. It would have saved him considerable heartbreak.

The eyeglassed officer looked up with a question.

"Have your guns moved back?" the interpreter asked.

"No!" answered Eadie.

It would seem that his battery had not yet been captured anyway.

The officer gave him back his bandanna and said something to the guards. They stepped forward, but the officer changed his mind. He spoke to the interpreter, and the latter indicated a door in the wall. One of the guards opened this door and motioned Eadie within. On the threshold the sergeant turned just in time to see a fat hand transferring his watch from the table to a trousers pocket. The two officers had gone to the other end of the room, and shortly Eadie heard the door bang as they went out.

Alone in the dark, strength gone, courage gone, watch gone, hope gone, the sergeant began to wonder what he should do next. It was too cold to go to sleep, and he had no tobacco with which to roll a cigaret. He was at the end of his rope.

"Come on, hard luck!" he said aloud. "You can't do anything to me now. Send her down, Davie; do your worst!"

Then they began to roll furniture about over his head.

"What next?" thought Eadie. "They sound as though they were breaking up housekeeping."

He remembered tales of the Germans seizing furniture and sending it home. They were probably emptying the house of movables.

The noise grew louder and more continuous; feet moved madly; there was the sound of scurrying in the cellar, and hurried orders. Louder and louder swelled the rumbling until it sounded like the continuous throbbing of a drum. *Crash! Crash-crash! WHAM!* A clattering of boards and the rattle of falling brick.

"It's a barrage!" shrieked Eadie. "A counter-attack! A counter-attack! Come on, you babies!"

He fell to beating on the door with his fists, yelling and shrieking. A faint shouting became audible, and sharper explosions that rose above the drumming of the barrage.

Eadie began to grope about the floor of the room, searching for something with which to beat down the door. He was confined in a small place that had evidently been a cold cellar for the storage of vegetables. It was in the shape of an L, and when the sergeant had reached the bend in the room and was around the corner he could feel the house trembling. There was another explosion like a peal of thunder overhead, shrieks, the sound of crashing timbers; then the heavens seemed to be split asunder, and Eadie was hurled to the ground as by a mighty hand, where the light of his mind went out in whirling blackness.

IN THE early dawn the captain of one of the companies of American troops that had retaken the town was on a tour of inspection with a medical officer, looking for stray casualties. There was just enough daylight so that one could see one's way about.

"There's a house that isn't worth much any more," said the doctor, regarding the rear wall of what had once been a large building.

The front and sides had been collapsed by shell-fire and tumbled into the cellar.

"That was their P.C., too," said the captain, pointing to a sign on which the word *Kommandantur* was painted and which was still hanging over the cellar entrance.

"Let's look in," suggested the medico, and the two went down the littered stairs, where the medico turned his flashlight on the interior.

Shattered beams and tangled bodies of men, covered thick with the dust of plaster and bits of wreckage.

"Hands up!" barked the captain suddenly. "There's a man in there; I saw him move!"

"It's all right," said a voice from the darkness. "I'm an American. I was a prisoner here. Let me borrow that flashlight a minute, will you?"

"Come out here where we can get a look at you," commanded the captain, "or I'll throw you down a grenade to play with."

A dismal-looking scarecrow appeared at the foot of the steps, his uniform blackened and torn.

"What's your name?" demanded the officer. "What the —— are you doing in that cellar?"

"I'm Sergeant Eadie, from the 96th Field. I was a prisoner in there. A shell or an aeroplane bomb made a direct hit on the house and knocked me out. I was in a room off the cellar, and when I came to I crawled out. The explosion broke in the door. Let me borrow that light, will you please?"

The dumfounded medical officer extended the flashlight. Eadie seized it with a grimy hand and disappeared. The two officers watched the beam of light glinting here and there among the fallen beams.

"What are you doing in there?" cried the captain. "Come out of that. I want to look into this a little more. Come out of there now, or I'll perforate you."

"Just a minute, sir," came the cheerful reply from the cellar.

The beam of light steadied a minute or so; then the sergeant reappeared on the steps. The captain glared at him.

"What's the meaning of all this?" he demanded hotly. "What do you mean by running off in there while I was talking to you?"

"I was looking for the Hun that swiped my watch," replied Eadie. "I found him, too."

He held the watch affectionately to his ear. "It's still going, so I guess it wasn't hurt any."

The
CAMP-FIRE
A Meeting-Place
for
Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

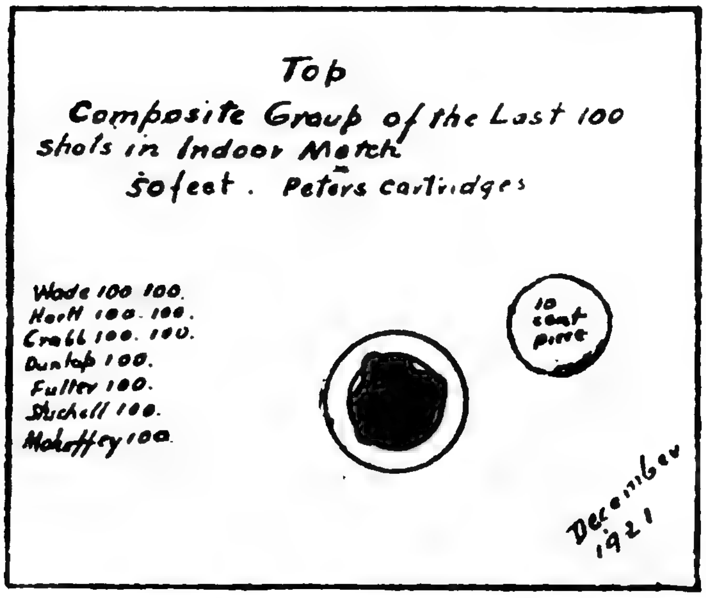
EVERY so often some one on the staff lets somebody in one of our stories hit some one with the butt of a revolver instead of the barrel. I'm about reconciled about this time and just mourn a little when it happens. As to the second point Mr. Crabb raises in his letter, I too have marveled over the unfailing accuracy of marksmanship displayed by characters in fiction, but then wonderfully accurate marksmen do exist and therefore are fine material for stories and naturally appear often in them. If they weren't such good shots, they wouldn't be so useful and impressive for fiction purposes. Can't say that the score shown in diagram below seems much of an argument to prove poor shooting.

Now as to this butt-barrel business. One of you stated that in certain localities hitting over the head is done in the case of automatics, with the barrel. How about it?

Shoshoni, Wyoming.

Well, having a few minutes to myself I will proceed and criticise some of your writers especially when they buck in on the shooting game. I am glad to note that you have called down some of those guys who habitually make their heroes hit a man over the head with the butt of an automatic or a Colt Frontier. Not so very long ago our erstwhile mayor of Shoshoni had occasion to round up a rather drunken citizen. He grabbed him and took his .45 automatic away from him and was going to rap him over the head with the muzzle, when he stopped suddenly. I asked afterward what made him stop and he told me that it was the first time that he had ever handled an automatic pistol, although he had been raised in the West, and as he glanced at the new fangled gun the idea occurred to him that if he butted the man over the head with it it might either fly in pieces or else start shooting backward. The drunken man, by the way, was the identical—— —— who is mentioned pretty often in the article entitled "Cassidy and the Wild Bunch" by Bechdolt.

THERE is another laughable thing that you ought to call the attention of some of your writers to, and that is the phenomenal accuracy of their pistol and rifle shooting. Not long ago there was a very interesting story about a fellow who was such a pistol shot that he could hit a cameo scarf-pin at 50 feet, every shot with a pistol. Enclosed find a blue-print of the last score made at 50 feet by the Shoshoni Rifle Club in the N.R.A. series for the indoor championship of the U. S. Mind you, we were shooting with the very best .22 rifles, telescope sights and all the modern improvements including hot and cold water. The average scarf-pin seems about .30 inch in diameter. It takes a very accurate 22 caliber rifle to make, a (guaranteed) group of ½ inch at 25 yards. What then, can you expect of a pistol or revolver?



As for those hip-rest shooters, why, I have to take off my hat to their wonderful performances.—EDWARD L. CRABB.

HUSKY and malemiut again. Something from one of our Canadian comrades:

Vancouver, British Columbia.

I see the husky and malemiut again being discussed. From 1893 to 1895 I traveled the north from Kadiak Island to the mouth of the Mackenzie River. I found the so called malemiut around St. Michaels and all around the Behring Sea coast, but as soon as I traveled the Behring Straits and clear around to the Mackenzie, I found a different type of dog, which we called the "Equimaux dog."

THE Esquimaux dog was quite different from the malemiut inasmuch as he was smaller, quicker and had all the characteristics of a true wolf whose size had been reduced through generations of close interbreeding and insufficient food. The malemiut, on the other hand, was evidently a cross between either a true wolf (or the Esquimaux dog) and our domestic dogs.

The malemiuts varied in size, shape and color and, although the general appearance was wolf-like, yet there was no doubt but that our domestic dog was present in the breed, as they were partially domesticated. The true Esquimaux dog can hardly be called domesticated in any way. It would take up too much space to give you all the reasons for my opinion.

Re the husky: I would say that those I have seen in the interior of the North are quite a distinct breed, due, I am given to understand, to the fact that they are the result of careful crossbreeding by the old Hudson's Bay factors from generation to generation. The true husky I believe to be a cross between the timber wolf and St. Bernard and Newfoundland bitches. They are much bigger, heavier and do not in any way resemble in appearance either the Esquimaux dog or the malemiut.—MAURICE M. NARSDEN.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom Conroy Kroder rises to introduce himself—not on the occasion of his first story in our magazine, however, though the blame for that lies with us here in the office.

I wonder whether by any chance that American marine is among us and whether he'd tell us about his attendance at the Empress Dowager's circus performance?

Sebastopol, California.

Here's Opportunity! The whole Adventure Brotherhood for audience, and the subject that highly important personage, Myself, around whom twirls the universe. But for worthy material, what a lack!

FOR drifting into the world, I can hardly claim credit; nor for resuming the drift at seventeen—force of circumstances there. Chance largely rules in our early years, I think; certainly it ruled in mine—and I was willing. For instance, on my eighteenth birthday I stood on a wharf in Detroit with the exact fare to Chicago or to Buffalo in my pocket, and indecision in my mind. I flipped a coin for traveling direction and Chicago won. Or lost! I've never been East since.

Kansas next, then Oklahoma—Oklahoma has changed some since. In those days twenty-five dollars and youthful optimism was a fortune—I started a weekly paper down there on less. It blew up and I came to California, then to the Philippines, Japan, China—Peking of the eternal "jawbone." Who of your readers remember the Chinaman misnamed Schultz whose fatalistic smile never faded even while the American and Austrian marines clubbed each other in his drinking-place to the total destruction of his stock of *Germania brau*. Beer flowed that night, as well as blood. Lately I've realized the heinousness of that affair!

Peking held me a joyous year. Who remembers Borowsky's circus and the enormous ape with the enormous thirst ("all the same Megwa") and how, one night, full of *Germania brau* and King Eddie whisky, he burst the bars of his cage—but that was in Vladivostok. Well, Borowsky did give a private performance in Peking to the old Empress Dowager and court, and an American marine was an unbidden and unseen guest. So he claimed—'twas a good story, anyway.

SIX months on a British tramp, Australia, New Guinea and the pearling stations—do you know that Gordon Young's stories of the South Sea Islands are rather under-colored, if anything? Which is meant as praise; restraint's the convincing thing. Then the Philippines again. Then, home!

I've wandered a bit, because wandering's been easier than standing still. Somehow I've always got by. My occupations have been various; I haven't detailed them because none of them "took"; nor have they ever seemed to me important—means to an end, and that end, *living*. Oh, yes, I was in the last war; the hardest grind I ever bucked was four months in the I. C. O. T. S., and that's all I'm going to write about that.

All in all, I haven't resulted in much, you see. But wait—three real adventures I've had, though I played the minor part in them. One, when I stood before the Preacher and vowed, "until death do us part," and two tours of sentry-go in hospital corridors waiting for the little cry which announces another arrival into this fascinating, joyful, sorrowful world. Yes, we are four in our family now, all healthy, happy and loving each other—and surely that's *something*.—CONROY KRODER.

AND HERE is a word concerning his story in this issue:

In "Trouble in Company D" I have tried to paint an absolutely correct picture of Army life in the Philippines in the old days of the "Empire," as we used to call it. Otherwise, in the early days of American occupation. Absolutely nothing happens in this story that could not have happened in actuality. For instance, the American-Visayan-Malanao triangle is history; and the mutiny is history, too, only unwritten even in the Army muster-rolls, for much the same reasons which I have given. There are many men in the service and out (some, alas, in old soldiers' homes) who will remember it. I knew the first sergeant well. His name began with W.

To those who got their only taste of service during the last war, some of my details might seem a bit off. For instance, the infantry company is now more than doubled in size; platoons and platoon commanders have been introduced; and consequently some of the commands are different. I happen to have been breaking in some recruits in the Presidio, San Francisco, when the changes came out, and it was an infernal nuisance.—CONROY KRODER.

YOU will be sorry to learn that some of our writers' brigade suffered in the Berkeley fire. Owing to a pressman's strike, New York papers for more than a week prior to this writing have been almost non-existent, but letters from Harold L. Lamb, Bill Adams and Dr. Louis C. Mullitkin tell us that the homes of Arthur G. Brodeur, Theodore S. Solomons, Mrs. Harry D. Couzens and the house where Bill Adams' wife and daughter were living during the latter's attendance at the University were all reduced to heaps of ashes, some of them barely escaping with their lives.

By a kind of miracle the house of R. W. Gordon of "AA" escaped the flames, and Farnham Bishop had moved to Fresno a month before—his former home was burned to the ground.

Needless to say that Camp-Fire's hearty sympathy goes out to all who suffered. The loss of course, can not be covered by money even when fully insured, particularly in the case of notes and papers.

IN CONNECTION with his story in this issue John Webb raises a point as to ye gentle game of poker:

Brooklyn.

In regard to poker decision made by *Captain Mac:* I have heard it said by poker players that in case of two or more hands being equal in denominations the winning hand is decided by suit, with hearts as the highest. For years I was under the impression that the heart suit was really the highest, but recently, while casually looking through a copy of "Hoyle's Book of Rules," I found that the opinion which I have heard so often had no foundation. I think many readers of the magazine will be as surprized as I was.—JOHN WEBB.

MORE about David Morgan's fight with the Indians nearly a century and a half ago:

Morgantown, W. Va.

Reading some time ago in Camp-Fire a letter from one of the comrades concerning the fight of David Morgan with two Indians near Rivesville, W. Va., I have come across a little more information concerning same which might be of interest to Camp-Fire.

I BELIEVE this comrade stated that a monument had been erected to one of the survivors of that famous fight. He is correct; there is a monument now standing, which was erected to the memory of Sarah Morgan. This monument is located about two miles north of here, about one-half mile off the improved road leading from Morgantown to Star City, W. Va. It is a shaft about two feet in diameter with two bases, constructed of native sandstone. It is about fifteen feet high. The following is the inscription as I copied it:

IN MEMORY OF SARAH MORGAN
WIFE OF ELIJAH BURROWS 1767–1791

SHE WAS THE LITTLE GIRL WITH HER BROTHER STEPHEN IN THE MELON PATCH WHEN HER FATHER DAVID MORGAN HAD HIS FAMOUS FIGHT WITH TWO INDIANS NEAR RIVESVILLE, W. VA., APRIL 1ST, 1779.

L. R. SHAFFER.

A FEW words from Karl W. Detzer concerning his story in this issue:

Leland, Michigan.

Dear Camp-Fire: I am enclosing a map with my story in this issue, which may help some comrades to get their bearings. I have labeled the posts by the names they were called in the days of the story. Little Traverse now is Harbor Springs and Petoskey, for the settlement extended around the shore of Little Traverse Bay, scattering to where both the towns are now. Charlevoix, you see, was called Pine Lake Post. Among the traders, Big Beaver Island was known as the Isle de Castor, but the fishermen early called it Big Beaver. Gull Island, which in reality is only a tiny jut of land, I have enlarged and made the seat of the fishing fleet, a fictional juggling that I believe permissible.

THE Astor Warehouses, which are referred to early in the story, are those of John Jacob Astor, and were the beginnings of that great family fortune. It was shortly after the time of this story Astor turned over the business to his associates and gave all his attention to his eastern interests.

I am indebted to the Michigan Historical Society for the data upon which the tale is based. The situations are true, but the characters are imaginary.

When "The Pantry Watch" came out several months ago, a number of readers took me to task for several inaccuracies in my description of the vessel. May I explain that the schooner I described was the *Paisley*, Captain Symington, which went ashore on Sleeping Bear, in much the manner I have described, about twelve years ago. The schooner had been somewhat altered, when it had been used as a tow barge, in Green Bay, I believe, several years before.

But to prevent another attack by the sharpshooters, I have gone over the details of this yarn with a number of old-timers along this coast, and have their word for it that I have not committed assault and battery upon probability.—KARL W. DETZER.

ANOTHER of those anonymous letters, for "Mex" of course is not his name, and the odds are pretty heavy that he is not a Mexican.

Cedar Creek, Michigan.

In the *Adventure* of June 20th you knock the foreigners dead. Now what is the object? The way you talk the foreigner has no chance in this country. Now I'll ask you is there a real white American in this country? No, of course not. The only real American is the Indian. All the white did come across the sea, no matter when, but they did come. You are making a lot of fuss about it, but you are a foreigner the same as I.

I read *Adventure* for quite a long time and thought it was the best magazine, but from now on no more shall I gaze on its pages.

Yes, I came across, and I've seen much over there and here. Adventurer has no country. I love the world wide no matter if it is America or Russia or some other country.—MEX.

WHAT I said in that issue was that we Americans had opened our doors very generously to foreigners but that it didn't follow that we had given them the house, as so many of them seem to think. I closed with the following:

> By the last census there are only a little more than fifty-five per cent. of our population who are of white American parentage, but thank God there are among those with one American parent, among those of no American parents and among those of black parentage many who do know what fairness and gratitude are and what America and Americanism are, and who are just as good Americans as any one else and will be as stong and earnest as any one else if it comes to demonstrating that America still belongs to Americans.

So when "Mex" says I "knock foreigners dead" he is either a fool or a liar. He himself is of no importance; but he represents many like himself, and his half-witted argument is one very frequently heard.

"All Americans are or were foreigners," runs this bright little argument. Indeed yes, and so are practically all peoples of the world, since you will find very few humans anywhere whose ancestors didn't at some time come from somewhere else. By this kind of argument all French, Germans, Russians, English, Italians and all the rest of them are foreigners. It is a nice little argument, but it doesn't mean anything.

There is quite a lot of difference between the foreigner who came over here with ax and rifle and helped build this country out of a wilderness and the foreigner who comes over here after it is built and profits by the other fellow's labor, courage and brains. If people of the "Mex" type can't see this difference, their intelligence is such that they are not sufficiently above the moron to be fit for American citizenship.

But the native-born of today haven't done any hewing from the wilderness? Believe me, some of them have. And even those who haven't are entitled to the rights of inheritance. A man builds a house. He has a son. The man's right to the house he built passes to his son. If an outsider is admitted he comes in only through the generosity of the father and son. He does not own the house, nor is he entitled to any share in it until he has lived in it long enough to become part of the household. Until then he is an outsider—a foreigner.

Believe me, you foreigners who deny the Americans' right to their America, there is a vast difference between building a house or being born in one your father built and being admitted to a house built by another man.

There are in this country far too many foreigners like "Mex." Even of the foreigners who make good Americans we have all we need—more than we have shown ourselves able to Americanize properly, though that is more our fault than theirs. Stop immigration. Stop all immigration. America needs time to find herself again.

Here is another letter in response to the same article that annoyed "Mex."

New York City.

In your issue of June 20th I have read with indignation the letter from Ivantisek Tojta.

IT SEEMS to me the criticism from Tojta of the effect of money here, the legality of slavery up to sixty years ago and the enjoyment of citizens at sight of a man being roasted, comes in rather poor taste from any Slav. I happen to have been in some of the Slav countries prior to the Great War, and excepting for the small percentage of the educated and cultivated people, I do not think there is any race on earth which is so greatly lacking in the essentials of ordinary civilization, cleanliness and respect for the law. Unfortunately for us, it is this class of Slavs who emigrate to this country, and the educated and cultivated people stay at home and look with pleasure and joy upon the departure of the class who come here and thereby relieve their own country.

People born in foreign countries or born here of foreign parents are welcome only on one of two conditions—either they must consider themselves guests of the country and act as such, or they must become Americans and believe and do all of the things that glorious name stands for. Those who think and act otherwise place themselves in the class of what we, in my younger days, called "varmints," and I am in favor of—and would be glad to give an active hand in—removing them with the same short shrift we used to give to those creatures.

Let us stand for America and all it means for bigness, broadness and tolerance, but never excuse any one who tries by word or deed to soil Old Glory.—H. S. FLEMING.

THE battle of Wounded Knee, and the other side of the Indian question:

St. Louis, Missouri.

Camp-Fire: James Rall asks if any of the Camp-Fire readers can throw any light on the real facts of the Battle of Wounded Knee? My version came from a trooper who was there and is now living at Rochford, S. D. He admits that it was a slaughter, but the only difference between it and the Custer fight was that the advantages were on the other side. A great deal of mawkish sentiment has been poured forth on the injustice done to the poor Indian, and I do not deny that he has been misused by the encroaching white race, but when I recall the horrible brutality and tortures that were inflicted on innocent women and children, even in my day, I can not work up any great sympathy for Lo.

SHORTLY after the Battle of Wounded Knee General W. T. Sherman was buried here, and I attended the funeral. There was a magnificent turn-out of uniformed men, and contrasted sharply against the rest were the remnants of one regiment which was fresh from the Sioux campaign. Their uniforms were faded and worn, men and horses looked tired and drawn out, several were bandaged, one man having a bandage around his head partly concealed by his cap. I don't recall the number of the Regiment, but I do remember that one troop was represented by eight men. If these men had only been for an afternoon stroll and incidentally had butchered a few defenseless women and children, they certainly belied their looks.

If anyone thinks I am too severe in my arraignment, I will be pleased to argue the case further. I have known the Indians since a small boy and give them credit for their good points, which are many.—L. R. BAKER.

HOW about this? I know there are plenty of you in uniform. Does this suggestion appeal to you?

United States Marine Corps,
Marine Barracks, San Diego, California.

Has it ever occurred to you what a vast army of Camp-Fire members you have among the men in uniform? Again, did you know that a man in uniform is not permitted to wear insignia of any kind on his uniform? This group of *Adventure* adherents would doubtless admire to have a 71 insignia to show that they are members, but they can not wear the button. This brings me to the suggestion I want to make.

Would it not be possible to make an inexpensive ring with the 71 as a monogram?

That's all I wanted to say.

HENRY W. WEINHOLD.

A LETTER to me from Raymond S. Spears of our writers' brigade in response to some points raised in one of his stories.

Little Falls, New York.

I return letters of Messrs. Thompson and Greene, *re* a Ranger using automatics and steel-jacketed bullets. Mr. Thompson didn't seem to realize that a Ranger on detective duty might perhaps carry automatics in order to disguise himself. The arms issued by the State are not absolutely distinctive, but the Rangers, as a whole, are rather strong personalities, even in the most modest mood of a shy and diffident man-killer.

I THINK the automatic always does bother old-timers, used to the revolver draw—the sliding top suggests to the subconscious mind a kick in the arm above the bent wrist in a shot from the holster top. My expression "pointing from the hips" was too loose, but no shot was fired, and the proper automatic position, elbows right angled, against the side, with forearms horizontal, wrist straight and barrels horizontal would of course follow. In old revolver fast practise, I think the wrist was generally bent a bit, as that would make fanning or cocking a bit easier.

The illusion was spoiled for Mr. Thompson because of his own difficulties with automatics. I tried to help him out, but feel mighty shy (for I stopped over a dinner in his town, Texarkana, last Autumn) telling an Arkansaw-border-of-Texas man anything about gun practise. In my letter to him I tried to be humble and respectful, even if I was trying to help him in his difficulty.

THERE are two types of writers, I take it; those who write from the inside have all the emotional reaction of partisanship, as for example a cowman telling of a sheep war. The ones who write as observers lack the intense personal viewpoints and decisiveness, but have the advantage of being able to see both sides, giving perhaps a less vivid, but more accurate picture. That at least, is my own feeling when I look at subjects I know from the inside, as hunting, trapping, travel, and then look at those subjects which I have studied as an observer. I had a little experience as man-hunter, forest and game-law enforcing, but from that I judge I'd rather see than be a Ranger.—SPEARS.

THE point of the letter from Ira A. Thompson of Texarkana, Texas, is clear from the above letter. Mr. Greene's letter brings up a point not thus covered, so I give it and Mr. Spears' reply. That "steel-jacket" business is a general trouble-maker for writers and editors and I think Mr. Spears gets at the true inwardness of it.

Brooklyn, New York

I note that Raymond Spears in his story "The Ranger" mentions: "and not these steel-jacket projectiles!" and it makes me wonder why it is that authors constantly mention this and never seem to wish to learn the facts. Mr. Spears is one of many.

THERE is no such thing made as a steel-jacket bullet; the purpose of putting the jacket on the bullet is: In high power fire-arms where the twist of the rifling is very sharp a bullet of plain lead or tin lead alloy would strip and lead the rifle barrel, so to overcome this the bullet is jacketed; to rotate the bullet the rifling must cut the jacket; so it is evident that the jacket must be composed of material that is harder than the lead bullet and at the same time softer than the steel of the rifle barrel. They get this result by a jacket of cupro-nickel or an alloy of copper and nickel. Cupron is the Latin term for copper.

This is not intended as a kick, but as a point of information. Why is it that none of these gentlemen ever seem to get the right dope on these bullets? —H. L. GREENE.

MR. SPEARS' reply:

Little Falls, New York.

Dear Mr. Greene: You are right, of course, about steel-jacketed bullets. I don't know how the term originated, for sure, but my memory is that the first high-power "pencil" bullets—.30 calibers—were actually jacketed in a steel cylinder, and these wore the rifling and barrels so badly that the first .30-caliber sporting weapons lasted only a few score shots. Then the barrels were hardened, and the jackets softened.

But "steel-jacketed" is probably so familiar and conventional a term, though strictly inaccurate, that it will be used instead of a more accurate term. Cupro-nickel would be awkward, copper or nickel would be half awkward—I don't know a term that conveys exactly what "steel-jacket" conveys to a reader's mind.

HONEST Injun, I don't think you are quite fair to writers when you suggest they "never seem to wish to learn the facts." Every writer I know spends half or more of his time "learning the facts." I never knew any school boy to study harder than writers, putting in longer hours a day. Read the "Ask Adventure" list of names, and consider what is behind that offer of information covering the world's regions.

Your quotation was inaccurate, for I said, obviously indicating exactly what the town marshal thought "Trusty old smoker, spitting raw lead and not these ripping, new-fangled steel-jacketed projectiles!" I've heard men talk that way too often to back down on my quotation of a man of that type's words. I'd said "steel-jacket" myself—do say it, and those of us who grew out of the tin-lead bullet era into the jacketed bullet eras understand that talk, and that's a writer's job, to be understood as exactly as may be.—R. S. SPEARS.

PERHAPS I'm wrong, but it seems to me *Adventure* readers are far more friendly and understanding toward its writers than is the average reader to the writers of other magazines. Yet I wish there could be a still wider understanding of what being a writer means. To many people a writer's job seems pretty soft and easy—all he has to do is to get some paper, a typewriter or pencil or pen, a little spare time, and then jauntily dash off a story. Such things do happen, but not often. Oh, boy! Try it for yourself a year or so and then deliver judgment.

I've known a good many writers in the past twenty years—hundreds, thousands of 'em. Wrote fiction a bit myself years ago. It's my idea of a fine life—if you can get away with it. But unfortunately there are probably only one or two per cent. (maybe it's even five per cent.) of those making the attempt who are able really to get away with it. Why so many who can't? Because succeeding with any real success necessitates having one or both of two things—real talent in that line and a willingness for lots of very hard work.

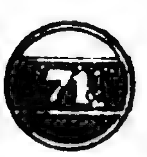
Writing is hard enough even after you've gathered the material therefor. Gathering the material is another large job in itself. To attain so thorough and exact a knowledge of it that your stories are flaw-proof against a million or two of active critics—well, that is a large, large undertaking.

Adventure's writers have to meet a particularly severe test, for *Adventure* readers make a particularly strong demand for accuracy and fidelity to fact and color. Sometimes a writer can bluff his way past us editors, but heaven help him when you readers get at him! If he isn't firmly grounded, he can't last long in these pages. Thanks to you readers more than to us here in the office, *Adventure's* fiction stands pretty high in trustworthiness as to the material used.

Keep right after them and us. We all need it and profit by it. But don't labor under the idea that these writers just dash things off carelessly! In the case of Mr. Spears, for example—how long do you suppose it would take you even to read all the references and files of material he has been gathering most of his life and needs and uses in his work?

DON'T forget that "Still Farther Ahead" supplementing "The Trail Ahead" now gives a survey of what the next four issues will contain.—A. S. H.

OUR Camp Fire stations are spreading steadily over the way. Help make them grow.



A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

Arizona—200—Clifton. C. Hooker.
209—Quartzsite. Buck Conner, Box 4.
Arkansas—161—Hot Springs. Tom Manning, Jr., 322 Morrison Ave.
California—28—Lost Hills. Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Monson, Cottage Inn.
38—Los Angeles. Colonel Wm. Strover, Westlake Military School, Mount Washington.
60—San Bernardino. Charles A. Rouse, Hotel St. Augustine.
73—Galt. E. M. Cook, Box 256.
74—Eagle Rock. John R. Finney, 109 Eddy Ave.
89—Chico. K. W. Mason, 1428 Park Ave.
108—Helendale. G. R. Wells, P. O. Box 17.
113—Vallejo. Edith G. Engesser, Golden Triangle Rabbitry, Highway Homes.
114—Mill Valley. Louis F. Guedet, Restawhyle Knoll.
115—Los Gatos. G. H. Johnson.
116—Sabastopol. Mrs. Lucy E. Hicks, 420 S. Main St.
126—Covelo. Whit H. Ham. Box 388.
141—Santa Cruz. A. W. Wyatt, Capitola Road and Jose Ave.
149—San Francisco. A. H. Hutchinson, Veterans Press, 1264 Valencia St.
186—Santa Ysabel. William Strover, Santa Ysabel Inn.
201—Los Angeles. Herbert P. Eaton, 128 West 109th St.
210—Berkeley. Dr. Louis C. Mullikin, 305 Acheson Bldg.
211—Pomona. Fred G. Sunley, 480 E. Alverado St.
212—Del Monte. Alex H. Sokoloff, 3rd. Signal Co. R. O. T. C.
Colorado—105—Grand Junction. Bart Lynch, 236 Main St.
176—Denver. Elmer S. Burrows, 3407 Larimer St.
Connecticut—103—New Haven. Ralph Pierson, 3 Yale Station.
142—Meriden. Homer H. Brown, 1 Colony Place.
D. C.—167—Washington. Walter A. Sheil, 503 Sixth St. N. E.
Florida—87—Miami. A. C. Smith, 49 N. E. First St.
117—Miami. Miami Canoe Club, 115 S. W. South River Drive.
126—Titusville. Max von Koppelow, Box 1014.
139—St. Petersburg. Capt. Lee Whetstone, Hotel Poinsettia.
143—St. Petersburg. J. G. Barnhill, 10 Third St. N.
158—Crescent City. E. N. Clark, care *Call.*
188—Johnson. Clifford Martin.
Georgia—98—Hinesville. R. N. Martin, *The Liberty County Herald.*
Idaho—110—Pocatello. C. W. Craig, 223 S. Second Ave.
Indiana—18—Connersville. Norba Wm. Guerin, 112 East Eighteenth St.
90—Linton. Herschell Isom, 73 Tenth St., N. E.
180—Warsaw. Homer Lewis.
Illinois—47—Peoria. B. H. Coffeen.
66—Mt. Carmel. W. C. Carter, 1122 Chestnut St.
67—Plainfield. J. P. Glass, The Linshield Co.
189—Chicago. Herman A. Schell, 8708 Vincennes Ave.
213—Chicago. Pietro Ferraro, 1007 S. Peoria St.
Kentucky—144—Corbin. Keith Mauney.
190—Louisville. H. S. Summers, 421 W. Jefferson St.
Louisiana—191—Neita. Wm. P. Stephens.
202—New Orleans. W. Bailey, 1116 Iberville St., Cor. Basin.
Maine—19—Bangor. Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St.
59—Augusta. Robie M. Liscomb, 73½ Bridge St.
111—Lewiston. Howard N. Lary, 714 Main Street.
Maryland—55—Baltimore. Henry W. L. Fricke. 1200 E. Madison St. at Asquith.
82—Baltimore. Joseph Patti, Jr., 4014 E. Lombard St.
151—Williamsport. L. J. Schaefer. Frederick St.
Michigan—69—Grand Rapids. Dr. A. B. Muir, 1133 Lincoln Ave., N. W.
79—Lansing. Geo. H. Allen, *Lansing Industrial News,* 109½ N. Washington Ave.
106—Gaylord. Sidney M. Cook.
131—North Muskegon. James Fort Forsyth, Forsyth Publisher's Service, Phone 5891.
137—Flint. O'Leary & Livingston, 309 So. Saginaw St.
192—Pickford. Dr. J. A. Cameron, The Grand Theater.
Minnesota—112—St. Paul. St. Paul *Daily News,* 92 E. Fourth St.

145—Brainerd. F. T. Tracey, care Brainerd Gas & Electric Co.
181—Ortonville. T. Glenn Harrison. *The Ortonville Independent.*
Mississippi—88—Tunica. C. S. Swann, Box 244.
99—Picayune. D. E. Jonson.
Missouri—51—St. Louis. W. R. Hoyt. 7921 Van Buren St., phone Riverside 250.
94—St. Louis. C. Carter Lee, M. D., 3819 Olive St.
127—Salem. Emmet C. Higgins, 100 N. Tenth St.
Nebraska—95—Omaha. L. W. Stewart. 119 No. 16th St.
214—Tecumseh. Dr. C. F. Roh.
New Mexico—96—Silver City. Edward S. Jackson, Box 435.
203—Elephant Butte via Engle. Henry Stein.
New Jersey—17—Caldwell. Chas. A. Gerlard. Box 13.
164—Chatham. Roy S. Tinney.
91—Tenafly. Ed Stiles, P. O. Box 254.
146—Paterson. Charles S. Gall, 378 Dakota St.
New,York—23—Jamestown. W. E. Jones, 906 Jefferson St.
34—New York City. St. Mary's Men's Club, 142 Alexander Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.
107—New York City. Bronx Division, U. S. Junior Naval Reserves, 3132 Webster Ave.
147—Youngsville. Harry Malowitz, Youngsville House.
165—Saratoga Wm. Marshall, Office No. 9, Chamber of Commerce Arcade.
171—Albany. 224 Greene St.
177—Brooklyn. George Iverson, 306 Macon St.
185—Brooklyn. J. M. Canavan, 69 Bond St.
193—Niagara Falls. Roy Tompkins, 1155 Garret Ave.
194—Hadley. Mrs. Chas. H. Black.
204—Buffalo. Joseph T. Rozar, 198 Madison St.
205—Newburgh. Jacques Teller, 5 Golden St.
215—George's Sport Shop, 45 Main St., Yonkers.
North Carolina—133—Pine Bluff. N. Steve Hutchings.
159—Waynesville. Harry M. Hall, 720 Walnut St.
92—Biltmore. C. Marshall Gravatt, Felstone Co.
North Dakota—160—Fargo. James E. Cowan, Central Garage, rear Grand Theatre.
206—Fairmount. Frank Kitchener, Richland Hotel.
Ohio—58—Cleveland. J. F. Thompson, Community Pharmacy, 9505 Denison Ave.
52—Ulrichsville. Anthony Sciarra, 329 W. Fourth St.
63—Ulrichsville. Chas. F. Burroway, 312 Water St.
75—Columbus. Chas. W. Jenkins, 54 S. Burgess Ave.
113—Buena Vista. Geo. T. Watters.
166—Toledo. Frank P. Casey, 3267 Maplewood Ave., or wherever his Ford happens to be.
207—Columbus. Tod S. Raper, 77 Taylor Ave.
Oklahoma—57—Haskell. Roy Holt.
Oregon—4—Salem. D. Wiggins.
187—Portland. W. J. Bolduke, 29½ N. Ninth St.
216—Portland. Miss Billie Russell, 532 E. 19th St.
Pennsylvania—20—Philadelphia. Wm. A. Fulmer, 252 S. Ninth St.
21—Braddock. Clarence Jenkins, Union News Co.
24—Philadelphia. Alfred A. Krombach. 4159 N. Eighth Street, and Spring Mills Station, P. & R. Ry. Co., Montgomery County.
78—Pittsburgh. Peter C. Szarmach, 350 Harmer St.
100—Philadelphia. Veterans of Foreign Wars, 926 N. 41st St.
121—Philadelphia. Don L. Brown, 3444 D St.
152—Harrisburg. Mrs. L. H. Wistrand, Washington Heights, Lemoyne.
182—Greensburg. Don Frederick Wermuth.
South Dakota—179—Fairburn. Jesse K. Fell, *Custer County Press.*
South Carolina—217—Charleston. J. H. Keener, 346 King St.
97 —Charleston. J. W. Mette, Navy Yard.
Tennessee—195—Knoxville. C. G. Pruden, 2024 Rose Ave.
Texas—33—Houston. J. M. Shamblin, 4805 Oakland St.
123—San Juan. D. L. Carter, Box 436.
134—Breckenridge. Joe Randel, 226 Baylor Avenue.
135—Mexia. Charles O. Hurley, M. D.
148—Port Arthur. Ralph C. Cornwell, 215 Eighth St.
174—San Angelo. E. M. Weeks, 24 West Eighth St.
183—South San Antonio. J. F. Nicodemus, Box 111, So. San Antonio Transfer.
218—Fort Worth. Robert Lentz, R No. 6 Box 73.
208—San Angelo. E. M. Weeks, 24 West 8th St.
Utah—157—Salt Lake City. Ned Howard, 127 N. St.
Vermont—56—Fort Ethan Allen. E. Worth Benson, Box 10.
Virginia—108—Cape Charles. Lynn Stevenson, Custom House Building
219—Richmond. Wm. Meek, 104 S. 1st St.
Washington—1—Ione. A. S. Albert, Albert's Billiard Hall.
61—Burlington. Judge B. N. Albertson, Fairhaven Ave.
83—Seattle. Chas. D. Raymer, Raymer's Old Book-Store, 1330 First Ave.
153—Monroe. Ed. L. Carson, *The Monitor.*
154—Mt. Vernon. Miss Beatrice Bell, Western Washington Auto Club.
155—Olympia. B. F. Hume, Commercial Club Rooms.
172—Sunnyside. Mark Austin.
196—Arlington. F. T. Herzinger.
220—Sultan. George W. Snyder, Main St., opp. Post Office.
West Virginia—48—Huntington. John Geiske, 1682 Sixth St.
Wisconsin—41—Madison. Frank Weston, 401 Gay Bldg.
5—Milwaukee. Paul A. Buerger, Apt. V, 1305 Cedar St.
138—Tomahawk Lake. Mrs. J. S. Hughson, Hughson's Resort.
Africa—173—Sinkat, Red Sea Province, Sudan. W. T. Moffat.
Australia—39—Melbourne. William H. Turner, "Wolwoling" Keen St., Northcote; and Carters' and Drivers' Union, 46 William St.
76—Victoria. Chas. M. Healy, 30, The Avenue, Windsor Post, Dist. No. 8.
130—Brisbane. H. V. Shead, Sutton St., Kangaroo Pt.
Belgium—131—Antwerp. Reuben S. James, Rue Chapelle de Grace 4.—Grate Kapel-straat, 4.
Canada—31—Howe Sound. C. Plowden, Plowden Bay.
84—White Rock, B. C. Charles L. Thompson.
22—Burlington, Ontario. T. M. Waumsly, Joscelyn Bookstore.
4—Dunedin, P. E. Island. J. N. Berrigan.
29—Deseronto. Harry M. Moore, *The Post Weekly.*
45—Norwood, Manitoba. Albert Whyte, 84 La Riviere St.
De Meurons St.
30—Winnipeg, Man. Walter Peterson, 143 Kennedy St.
63—Woodstock, Ontario. George L. Catton, 94 Metcalfe St.
85—Oshawa, Ontario. J. Worral, 6½ King St. E.
102—Amherst. Lloyd E. MacPherson, 5 Belmont St.
124—Hartshorn, Alberta. Leonard Brown, 33-34-17 W4M.
178—Moncton, N. B. Chas. H. McCall, 178 St. George St.
221—Montreal East. M. M. Campbell, 95 Broadway.
Newfoundland—132—St. John's. P. C. Mars, Smallwood Bldg.
Canal Zone—37—Cristobal. F. E. Stevens.
156—Ancon. Arthur Haughton, Box 418.
China—222—Tientsin. Dr. George W. Twomey, 48 Rue de France.
Cuba—15—Havana. Ricardo N. Farres, Dominques, 7 Cerro.
175—Miranda, Oriente. Volney L. Held.
Great Britain—65—North Wales. William J. Cooper, "Kia-Ora," Plastirion Ave., Prestatyn.
Hawaiian Islands—170—Leilehua, Oahu, Château Shanty.
Honduras, C. A.—32—Galeras, Olancho. Dr. Wm. C. Robertson.
70—La Ceiba. Jos. Buckly Taylor.
India—197—Calcutta. Wm. Leishman, 46 Wellesley St.
Mexico—68—Guadalajara, Jal. W. C. Mossy, Hotel Fenix, Calle Lopez, Cotilla Nos. 269 a 281.
136—Tampico, Tamps. Jack Hester, care of T. D. El Humo, Apartado 238.
223—Mazatlan, Sin. Paul L. Horn, Hotel de France, Apartado 102.
Navy—71—U. S. *Arizona.* Elmer E. McLean.
140—U. S. *Shawmut.* J. D. Montgomery.
Porto Rico—46—Ensenada. M. B. Couch, P. O. Box 5.
Philippine Islands—198—Manila. W. W. Weston, De La Rama Bldg.
West Indies—199—Santo Domingo. Valentine Pateman, Estate Consuelo, San Pedro de Macoris, R. D.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

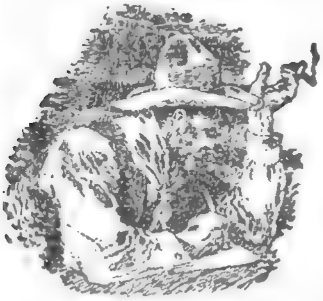
Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the first and third issues of each month. Full list in first issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fier Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.



QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

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4, 5. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
6, 7. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
8. Australia and Tasmania
9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
10. New Guinea
11. Philippine Islands
12. Hawaiian Islands and China
13. Japan
14—17. Asia. In Four Parts
18—25. Africa. In Eight Parts
26. Turkey and Asia Minor
27—29. Balkans. In Three Parts
30. Scandinavia
31. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
32—34. South America. In Three Parts
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36, 37. Mexico. In Two Parts
38—44. Canada. In Seven Parts
45. Alaska
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Tropical Forestry
Aviation
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Standing Information

Personal

READERS have been asking for the autobiographies of "Ask Adventure" editors; and those staff members who believe that a few words about themselves will promote better acquaintanceship all around, are responding to the request. The order in which these autobiographies are printed doesn't signify anything. They are withdrawn from the file at random:

Brooklyn, N. Y.

The Pentland Firth, which washes the most northerly coast of Scotland, is considered one of the nastiest seas in the world. And the spray of it must have come pretty close to washing the windows of the house in which I was born, since said house—the schoolhouse—stood on a bluff not more than a stone's throw away from high tide. The place was called Strathy, the parish was that of Farr, the shire, Sutherland; and my father was the schoolmaster there, teaching everything from the alphabet to higher mathematics, Latin, Greek and Hebrew; the Hebrew being for the benefit of the inevitable divinity student who is—or used to be—a product of nearly every Scotch Highland family. Strathy was twenty-one miles away from Thurso, where the railway ended, and its personality was in keeping with its heather-bound isolation. And though I got out of it at a very early age, owing to my father's death, most of the impressions it created are still with me.

The family moved first to Thurso and then to Glasgow, where I attended public school, and where in my spare time I held down several jobs delivering milk and morning and evening newspapers. This cured me for life of getting up early in the morning.

At thirteen I left school behind me and entered the offices of a political organization which, as it happened, was in the throes of preparing for a general election. And in my small way I became an active worker in the campaign, making my first acquaintance with printing through the medium of having to handle most of the campaign posters on their way to and from the printers. While connected with this office I met quite a number of men whose names were or have since become household words in British politics and elsewhere, among the most prominent being Joseph Chamberlain, Lord Kelvin, A. Bonar Law, who won his first parliamentary election that year (1900), A. J. Balfour and Lord Rosebery.

The secretary of the organization was a lawyer—Robert Bird, one of the Scottish minor poets and the author of one or two novels—and he found a place for me in his office after a while. So I drifted into the law, thinking I'd become one of them; studied for and passed my first law examination, which had nothing to do with Blackstone or any kind of jurisprudence; and then I decided, because I'd been infected with the writing bug in the interval, that I'd rather not. But it was while in this office that I wrote my first story and battled with the business of transcribing it on the old No. 6 Remington, which was up-to-date at that time. I later—several years later—sold that story in New York.

Meantime I deserted law for wholesale groceries. This was much easier, paid much better, and as my first job in life—at the age of nine—had been that of delivering baskets of groceries for a man who paid me ninepence (eighteen cents) for a fourteen-hour day (Saturday) I was right back where I belonged and felt better all around. Two years of dealing in bags of sugar and tubs of margarine led ultimately to west Africa which, as in the case of most men who go there, just happened.

I've already told *Adventure* readers in Camp-Fire about the accident that led to my acceptance of Miller Brothers' offer to send me out to Warri, southern Nigeria; and most of my west African life was spent in looking rather than in doing. As I have said before, it is amazing how much one can learn about a country like west Africa from the vantage point of a high stool in a trading-beach kernel store.

Of course, I traveled about, spent some time in the bush all by myself on a mahogany concession and had a chance to see how the other half lived when it was not on its best behavior for the benefit of the white trading agent or Government official. But if I never had walked a step, other than to pass from the living-quarters above the shop to the kernel store and back again, I could have "lifted" enough material to serve for several lifetimes; and nothing I can think of right now is more expressive of Africa than the shade of a kernel-store awning at high noon. Business has suspended, and the native in various stages of undress is sprawled about under the awning, doing that which he does better than anything else—which is nothing. The women who squat there most of the day are trying to keep their babies quiet while they shave the dusky, woolly little heads into all kinds of patterns with a blunt razor and no shaving-cream. Otherwise there is just the baking heat of the sun, and stark, dusty black figures spread-eagled and motionless as any mango log.

And in this particular above all else was my west African "adventure" the most valuable thing that ever came my way. It gave me a decided something to write about. And for the man with an urge in that direction, this is the first and most vital essential. So I stored up everything in sight, listened for all I was worth, and, though I can't say I did this with a true realization of the use I might be able to make of it, I nevertheless wrote west African yarns for years without consulting a single note or a book of reference.

On my return to Glasgow I had it all planned to go to the Gold Coast as accountant on a mine. The intervention of a New York friend brought me to New York instead. That is quite some time ago—1907, to be exact—and I've done numerous things since the old Anchor Liner *Astoria* dropped me off at the foot of West 23rd Street. Roughly speaking, I've been a book-keeper, a salesman and an editor. I've been in hardware and tea and fruit-juice and insurance and advertising and I've sold, or tried to sell, kippered herrings in cans in New York in July. This last spelled Ambition with a big A. And if there are any doubters in camp, I invite them to try it. All this, more or less, prior to ten years ago.

Then I thought I'd like to know why editors turn down the stories we writers like best and keep the ones we don't think will sell. So I became an editor, and after a while and for several years I piloted the *Argosy* on its weekly cruise in pursuit of higher circulation. This done, and considerable experience gained thereby, I went back to the business of writing—the job that began in the law office of David Bird & Son, West Nile Street, Glasgow, and which persisted, whether I liked it or not, in taking up most of my spare time in the variegated interval of twenty years.

For the rest, I am married—my youngest is twelve, my oldest in high school, and my next birthday will be my thirty-seventh. I lead a quieter life than I have any right to do, do most of my work between ten P.M. and three A.M.—after struggling for years to be as other men are and keep "office hours"—and am at present wrapped up in a novel which, I hope, will first see the light in *Adventure*.

And that, I think, is that.

I am not an adventurer. When I read Camp-Fire I feel like an intruder, and as if I ought to apologize for presuming to sit in. Most of my adventuring has been done right in the middle of New York City, which has at times made a west African mahogany concession in the middle of nowhere seem like a health resort and a haven of rest.—Robert Simpson.

Began outdoor career in Ozark Mountains of Missouri, and gained pen name of "Ozark Ripley" from late writer Jack London. For years was a professional trainer of shooting-dogs; guide, also game warden and deputy sheriff. Made several trips to Alaska and through different parts of Canada without any guide. Have killed all kinds of game on American continent except polar bear. While guide and in later years taught fly and bait casting for game fish, and became acquainted with all makers of fishing-tackle and guns.

Began writing fifteen years ago for the different outdoor publications under the pen name of Ozark Ripley. Later was induced to put some experiences in book form, and that is how my book "Jist Huntin'" came to find favorable lodgment on the market, and now have several coming on fishing and outdoor subjects. Guided the late Emerson Hough on one trip to the Ozarks, and am connected with the same paper in editorial capacity as he was—*Outdoor America*, the official organ of the Izaak Walton League of America. Did the fly-casting for the Associated Screen News Pictures which were taken on the Nipigon July, 1923. These are available at no expense to all gun and fishing clubs, as they are for the purpose of interesting people in fishing and wild life.

Was one of the first to tie up with *Adventure.* Was so persistent they have never been able to get rid of me. Never had but two question the correctness of my replies. I liked them for it; the nigger in the woodpile in each case was a misunderstanding. Am going to stick with Noyes and Hoffman until they or I die. They are the kind that never flatter a friend but are all the time fighting for him. Am going to put over on them very soon an outdoor story.—John B. Thompson.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Cholula and Its Pyramid

A BIT of architectural magnificence which recalls the builders of ancient Egypt:

Question:—"Can you tell me anything about the Pyramid of Cholula, in southern Mexico? I have read something about it but not a great deal."—Andrew Anderson, Elko, Nev.

Answer, by Mr. Mahaffey:—The date of the building of the Pyramid of Cholula is unknown. Even before the Aztecs came to the plain of Cholula the great pyramid was there in the midst, and the people told them that it was built by a race of giants descended from the two survivors of a great deluge that overspread the land, and whose intent was to raise its heights to heaven; but they incurred the anger of the gods, who sent forth fires and destroyed them. This indeed is the story that is coincident with the Chaldean and Hebrew accounts of the Deluge and the Tower of Babel, of which there is so much in the traditions of these people that is similar to the tales of the Bible.

On the summit stood the sumptuous temple of the mystic god Quetzalcoatl, the "god of the air," whose image was there under its pinnacled towers, as the chronicler says, with ebon features, wearing a miter on his head, waving with plumes of fire.

A resplendent collar was on his neck made of gold; pendants of mosaic turquoise were in his ears; and a curiously painted shield, emblem of his reign over the winds, was in one hand, with a jeweled scepter in the other.

Cholula was in those days what Rome is today. Pilgrims came there from hundreds of miles—as do the Mohammedans to Mecca—to bow down before the temple of Quetzalcoatl, in the holy city of Anahuac (the Aztec name for the Valley of Mexico).

Cortez declared that he counted four hundred towers in the city of Cholula; yet no temple had more than two, and some only one. High above the rest rose the great temple on the sacred pyramid with its never-dying fires spreading their radiance over the lands, with their promise of the return of the deity to resume his rule over the land.

Such were the pyramid and the city as the Spaniards saw it when they came, and the people there at the time knew as little of the builders of the pyramid as the Spaniards, or nothing more than is written here. The temple was thrown down, as was the custom of the conquerors, and a Christian church was built there that stands to this day.

The pyramid has the appearance of a natural hill, as its sides are overgrown with trees and bushes, an evidence of its great age. The interior is composed of alternate layers of adobe or sun-dried brick, clay and limestone. The height is one hundred and seventy-seven feet above the plain.

The four sides face the cardinal points and are laid in terraces that are now overgrown with shrubs and flowers. The base lines are more than a thousand feet on each side or twice as long as the great pyramid of Cheops in Egypt; and the base of the pyramid covers twenty acres of the plain. A paved road leads up the steep west side, with steps of hewn stone to the arch and cross of the doorway of the Church of Nuestra Señora de los Remedios, on the very top. From the balconies of the church the many churches with their glazed tile towers and the town are seen, making a superb view.

The town of Cholula has dwindled from the great capital of a mighty native nation to a town of less than 5,000 people. The market-place, Tianquiz, is still called by its ancient name.

Near the plaza are the ruins of the abandoned monastery of San Francisco, founded in 1529. The church on this spot, called San Gabriel, was founded in 1604; it has a very handsome altar of expensive adornment.

Near by, and adjoining the walls, is the Royal Chapel and Tercer Orden, whose roof of domes is supported by sixty-four round columns. This church was built in 1608 for overflow meetings. There are twenty-seven other churches in Cholula, and from the pyramid thirty more can be counted.

The pyramid is reached from the city of Puebla across the Atoyac Valley by means of a tramway, through the arch of the Garita de Mexico.

Fur-Bearers of Pennsylvania

HOW trappers get results from a flivver:

Question:—"I wish to ask about trapping in northern Pennsylvania. I do not see this State on your list, but don't see who does cover this, so am writing to you, hoping you can answer my questions.

What fur-bearing animals live in northern Pennsylvania in the counties of Warren, McKean and Potter?

Where would be the best location for a trapper who wished to stay during the months of November and December where the best furs can be taken during that time?

If you do not cover this territory can you tell me who does?"—J. B. VAN DEWARK, Sinclairville, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—You would find mink, weasels, (ermine) muskrats, 'coons, rarely a 'possum, skunk, occasionally otter, foxes, wildcats, perhaps bear, in Potter County and in adjoining counties. In Lycoming and neighboring counties, a big, thinly settled region.

No one could help you specially; the best trapping-country advice is first to study the map—topographical survey sheets of U. S. Geological Survey, Washington, D. C., if they cover your territory. Ask for Pennsylvania map index. Then pick a railroad station, drop off there and prospect for a week or so in the back country, talk to anybody you meet, find out if other trappers have their lines there, and in this way you may locate fur pockets where you could do good work with your sets.

You are subject to non-resident trapping and hunting license, and may find a lot of that country trapped over. But deer have increased enormously in Pennsylvania in late years, and also other game.

The Chief Game Protector, Harrisburg, Pa., would send you laws and perhaps give you advice from his special knowledge or names of local game wardens who might help you locate regions where you could well prospect for furs.

If by chance you travel in a flivver you could prospect all that country—and many a trapper now travels in a car from pocket to pocket, catching up fur in one place, going on till he finds another good one—especially in Western States.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Periods in Japanese Art History

NARA, by the way, was the capital of the empire from 709 to 784:

Question:—"Would you give me all information on the curios of Japan, where they can be had; and is there any way to distinguish imitations?"—L. ROBERT, Montreal, Canada.

Answer, by Mrs. Knudson:—I am afraid I can not give you *all* information upon the curios of Japan, for that might fill several volumes; but perhaps I can give you a general idea of the curio conditions there. The real curios of the empire—that is, the objects of value from an art standpoint—were produced throughout several distinct periods and follow the history of the development of the country's arts and crafts.

First. What is known as the pre-Nara period has left relics of metal work, lacquer, temple wood-carvings, porcelains and textiles.

Second. The Nara period, 708 to 793 A.D. From this time have survived some wood-carvings of Buddhist images, some metal castings, metal carvings and lacquer work. The greatest metal-casting curio of this period perhaps is a Buddha 53½ feet in height at Todai-ji temple, Nara, finished in 760 A. D.

Third. The Hei-an period, 794 to 1183 A.D., has left a few religious paintings, wood-carvings, metal work, lacquer and textiles.

Fourth. The Kamakura period, 1183 to 1332 A.D. This has left paintings, carvings, lacquer, etc., and in ceramics what is known as "old Seto."

Fifth. The Ashikago period, 1333 to 1574 A.D., left more in ceramics, notably dishes belonging to the old tea ceremonies, than any previous time. There are also carved masks—of the old *No* dances—wood-carvings and metal work from this period.

Sixth. The Toyotomi period, 1574 to 1603 A.D. From this time several old castles and palaces at Osaka, Juraku and Momoyame still survive with their paintings, carvings and lacquer work. Also much ancient armor and porcelain date back to these years. The famous Satsuma porcelain kilns were established at this period.

The relics and treasures from these early times are to be found only in museums, temples and castles and in valuable private collections. Few have found their way out of Japan into other countries.

Seventh. The Tokugawa period, 1603 to 1868. The majority of curios usually seen in modern collections come from this seventh period, which has left many paintings, prints, carvings, sword decorations, lacquer and pottery.

Eighth. A period of chaos, 1868 to 1882, when Western influence in all Japanese art works began to show strongly.

Ninth. Period of reaction, 1882 to 1896. Reaction against foreign influence and a return to real Japanese art.

Tenth. Period of construction. From 1896 to the present day. During this time the leaders have sought to encourage and preserve the native art.

A National Treasure Commission has been in existence since 1889 to register old art curios belonging to temples and other public buildings. Before this commission took note of the country's treasures, many were sold to foreigners. There are now many wealthy native collectors, and occasionally some fine collection is put up for sale through bodies of organized curio dealers in Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka and Nagoya—chiefly. But one rarely finds any genuine art curios in an ordinary salesroom or shop. The year 1917 was a big curio auction year; forty-five auctions took place in Japan's big cities, with a total of about $10,000,000 as proceeds. A few months ago a rare tea-caddy sold at one of these curio sales for 57,000 yen, or $28,500.

Much of the modern art work is good and well worth possessing. There is no way to tell imitation antiques from genuine excepting familiarity with them through study and handling. The museums and old temples and castles are the best sources of study of the real articles.

For books read "The A B C of Japanese Art" by J. F. Blacker; "Things Japanese" by Basil Hall

Chamberlain; "Arts and Crafts of Old Japan" by Stewart Dick; "The Painters of Japan," Arthur Morrison; "The Arts of Japan," Edward Dillon.

Trapping in Ontario

ONCE again it is necessary to remind inquirers to *make their questions specific*. Too much to ask the "A. A." expert to write a general treatise on all he knows in his particular field; it would probably take most of them from two years to life to comply:

Question:—"Would appreciate you giving me a little dope on your part of the country—about trapping and hunting fur-bearing animals and about Winter weather and civilization. Want to know the best place you have in charge. And also trapping rights and the red tape one has to go through to get started in that line of business. And if possible please send a map of your section. And about bringing an outfit over the Line: What part of trapper's outfit would I not have to pay duty on?"—W. A. STEVENS, Ruth, Nev.

Answer, by Mr. Catton:—You are just a trifle too general in your questions, Mr. Stevens. You ask for a "little dope" on trapping and hunting and Winter weather and civilization and the "red tape" one has to go through to "get started" in the trapping and hunting "business," etc., etc.

Gosh, man! How can I know just what you want to know? And not knowing just what you want to know, what can I tell you and be sure of giving you just the right dope? It can't be did! The best I can do without writing you a general treatise of several hundred thousand words is to give you a little general info and tell you to write again if I haven't told you what you want to know. And if you write again—I hope you do—please be specific and number each question.

First I wouldn't advise you to trap in southern Ontario or in the vicinity of Georgian Bay—my territory—at all. The fur-bearers are pretty well thinned out, and there are too many trappers located here already for what is left.

Next, if you haven't spent a good many years trapping and don't know the game from A to Z don't try it at all—unless you are doing it merely "for the fun of it." Only the wisest of wise trappers ever make a success of it, and it's the hardest work in the world!

The fur-bearers in Ontario are beaver, otter, fisher, marten, mink, muskrat (musquash), weasel, fox (red, cross, black). skunk, 'coon, bear. Running meat: Moose, deer, rabbits, hares, besides the partridges, quail, plover, ducks and geese.

Weather in the hunting and trapping grounds: Summer usually short, middle of June to middle of September, temperature ranging from 40 to 100 in the sun, frequent thunderstorms and dry periods; Winter five to six months, usually from about middle of October till middle of April, cold, temperature ranging from freezing to forty or more below zero, snow deep, frequent snowstorms and blizzards; Spring and Fall wet and cold and raw.

Civilization: Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay too thickly populated with farmers, hunters, trappers, and—in Summer—resorters to be good any more for profitable trapping except in the immediate vicinity of the parks or reserves, where are located now all the trappers the ground will serve.

For the "red tape"—game laws covering trapping and fishing—write the Department of Game and Fisheries, Parliament Buildings, Toronto, Ont., as they—the laws—are far too lengthy and involved for a letter. For maps write Mr. J. E. Chalifour, Chief Geographer, Ottawa, Ontario.

Can't just say the "part of a trapper's outfit" you would have to pay duty on. That will be for the customs officer to decide. Part of your outfit would come in free—wearing-apparel, etc.—part of it would call for duty, to be refunded on your return—rifle, canoe, etc.—and part of it would require full duty.

Porteños

ORIGINATORS of the tango:

Question:—"Can you tell me something of the customs of the people of Argentina? Something of the way they dress? Did the tango dance originate in Argentina? Will you describe steps? I would also like to know something of language and travel.

Are the people of Venezuela, Chile, Peru and Brazil alike in customs or different? If so in what way?"—D. P. RICHARDS, Decatur, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Barbour:—It is hard without writing a book on the subject to tell of the customs of the people of Argentina. The upper-class city dwellers lead about the same lives that people do in cities anywhere in the world. Horse-racing and lotteries are very popular. The *Porteños*, as the people of Buenos Aires call themselves, are pleasure-loving and spend money freely. They love good music and appreciate their splendid opera. They also have the Latin love of beauty, as manifested in their parks, plazas and public buildings.

Out on the pampas they live about the same lives as in the less thickly settled farming sections of our own middle West, only with fewer modern conveniences. Generally speaking, all classes are light drinkers but very heavy eaters.

The well-to-do folk dress very well, the ladies in the latest Parisian style, the men more in English styles. The peons dress mostly in cotton, barelegged, with rope sandals called *alpargatas*.

The tango originated in the dance-halls of Buenos Aires and is still very popular there among all classes of society. It is more graceful than the tango as danced in this country. I am afraid it is beyond my power to describe the steps. The music is rather weird, in a somewhat syncopated time, and is characteristic of the country. It is said that it is hard to play properly.

Spanish is the official language of Argentina, though as the population is a mixture you are apt to hear half a dozen languages spoken in a restaurant. Out in the wilder sections there are a number of Indian dialects still in common use. Travel is up-to-date so long as you do not wander too far off the beaten paths. Railways are up-to-date and comfortable.

Venezuela, Chile and Peru speak Spanish and in general have the same customs as Argentina, though they are not so progressive and are more old-fashioned in their customs. Brazil uses the Portuguese language, but its customs are about the same.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

CHARLES L. MILLER, of Waycross, Ga., has just sent in a most interesting series of fragments—many of them work songs—which he remembers having heard in the railroad and construction camps of Virginia, West Virginia and Tennessee.

They are quite too good to be hidden away in the office files, one in particular, "My Ole Hammah," which Mr. Miller rightly singles out for special praise. So I'm going to print them just as they are, partly because I think you will like them and partly because I hope that they will stir up old memories and induce more of you to "sing up."

Mr. Miller says: "I do not know that the fragments will be of much help, but, as you know, there is a song that goes, 'Every little bit helps.' The steel-driving chant does not look very impressive on paper. But that chant, sung by the right people, in the correct way, and in the proper place, will make the back of my head tingle. And that is something very few who sing for money on the stage can do."

Oh, once I had a fortune;
I laid it in my trunk;
I spent it all a-gambling
One night when I was drunk.

And I'll never get drunk any more!
No, I'll never get drunk any more!
I'll lay . . . bar-room door,
But I'll never get drunk any more!

* * * * * *

Wake up, Little Maggie!
What makes you sleep so sound?
The highway robbers are raging,
And the sun is almost down.

* * * * * *

When you heah that bull dog barking—
Somebody round, baby,
Somebody round!

When you heah my faughty-fo' fiah—
Another man gone, baby,
'Nother man gone!

* * * * * *

I looked at the sun, and the sun looked high,
I looked at the boss, and the boss looked shy.

And it's roll on, buddy,
What makes you roll so slow?
Your buddy is almost broke
Down on the K. N. O.

In a few more days, and that won't be long,
Till the roll will be called, and I'll be gone.

And it's roll on, buddy,
What makes you roll so slow?
Your buddy is almost broke
Down on the K. N. O.

* * * * * *

I ain't goin' to work on the railroad,
I ain't goin' to work on the farm!
I'll lay round town till the pay-train comes,
And roll in my Dony's arms.

* * * * * *

My old hammah . . . shina like silvah . . .
shina like gol',
Yes, shina like gol'!

There's no hammah . . . in this ole mountain . . .
shina like mine,
Shina like mine!

This ole hammah . . . killed my buddy . . .
but it can't kill me,
No, it can't kill me!

I've been wukin' . . . in this ole tunnel . . . fo'
long year,
Fo' long year!

And if I live . . . till next December . . . I'se
gwine home,
Yes, I'se gwine home!

FROM another correspondent, who requests that his name be withheld, I quote a "work-song" unusual in form but of considerable literary merit, and add a portion of his letter:

"It is time some one collected the songs men used to sing as they worked, for the old race of singing men seems to be extinct.

"And the songs they sang! When I think of them I see again the peach nurseries with their endless rows of trees, down which the budders with their tiers, singing, crawled; and the logging-camps at night, when the 'fiddlers' sent out into the dusk tunes that have wandered down through the centuries, vibrating from violin to violin; and the barytes mines where men at the throbbing pumps sang all night long the wailing ghosts of airs by which their forefathers marched out to die at Flodden Field, or taunted Johnny Cope at Prestonpans.

"The nursery trees have grown to orchards now; the mines, abandoned, have fallen in; the corn and cotton grow around the sawmill 'sets,' and the men who worked there are scattered and gone—God knows where. But I believe that somewhere, back in the 'Big Mountains,' there are still men who stand with their feet on the earth and work out of doors; and as they work they sing.

"Some day I hope to go there and hear them sing again—even if they sing the song I once despised:

" 'Water-boy, water-boy, fetch the water round.
If you can't find the water, set your bucket down.'

"I am sending some songs which I have heard men sing as they worked, and which I have never heard anywhere else. Many of them are what they call "campmeeting songs"—of which the following was a favorite:

A blind man lay
Beside the way;
He could not see the light of day.
The Lord came by and heard him say,
"O Lord, he'p me
So I can see—
O Lord, will you he'p-a-me!"

A Man He died,
Was crucified;
They hung a thief on either side;
One lifted up his voice and cried,
"O Lord," said he,
"Won't you he'p-a-me!
O Lord, will you he'p-a-me!"

The thief he said before he died,
"O Lord, will you he'p-a-me!"
And the blind man stood by the way and cried,
"O Lord, will you he'p-a-me!"

THERE is something haunting in these songs of humble origin, something that grips, that makes our modern artistic songs look pretty sick by comparison. Send in more of them; and remember that fragments are often almost as useful as complete songs. At least they make it possible to hunt for complete versions that might otherwise never be traced.

BY THE way, can any one send in a complete version of a song that tells how the devil carried an old woman to hell—and brought her back again? Burns made a good poem of the story, but I want versions of the earlier song. One incomplete version that I have begins:

There was an old Dutchman lived near hell,
Come Jen for Jen—come Rolly Marie.
The devil came after his only son,
As the dew rolls over the green val-lee.

" 'Tis not your oldest son that I crave,"
Come Jen for Jen—come Rolly Marie,
"But your scolding wife as she lays in her grave,"
As the dew rolls over the green val-lee.

Another song that a comrade has asked the Camp-Fire to obtain for him tells the story of the famous Indian fighter, Tom Quick. It was popular in Pennsylvania some fifty years ago, and contains the following stanza:

Tom Quick he lived in the Sullivan Hills
By the Delaware's rolling tide.
'Midst hemlock rills and laurel sills,
Away from the world and all its thrills,
He hunted far and wide.

And who knows a more modern song about Stackerlee containing the following blood-curdling stanza:

Oh, the dogs did howl—the dogs did bark,
When Stackerlee the murderer went creepin'
through the dark!
Everybody talk about Stackerlee.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

JANUARY 20TH ISSUE

Besides the **four complete novelettes** mentioned on the second page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

CAPTAIN TOOKLE TAMES A QUEEN ***Thomas Topham***
Strong-arm methods in the bandit country of Lower California.

SERVICE TROUBLE AT TALKING CROW ***Raymond S. Spears***
Strange doings at a lonely garage in the desert.

NUGENT AMUCK ***Ralph R. Guthrie***
Getting in touch with Mohammed by radio.

THE LONG KNIVES A Five-Part Story Part III ***Hugh Pendexter***
"Mad Anthony" Wayne's scouts in the hands of the hostile Shawnees.

HOW IT WORKED ***William Byron Mowery***
Man-hunting tricks in the snow country.

THE MAN IN THE WATER ***James K. Waterman***
"There she blows and blusters and spumes!"

Still Farther Ahead

IN THE three issues following the next there will be *long stories* by Leonard H. Nason, J. Allan Dunn, Wilbur Watkins, Arthur D. Howden Smith, Frederick J. Jackson, Barry Scobee, J. D. Newsom, Harold Lamb and Charles Victor Fischer; and short stories by E. S. Pladwell, John Webb, Michael J. Phillips, Patterson James, Clements Ripley, Conroy Kroder, F. St. Mars, George E. Holt, John Eyton, William Harper Dean, Sidney Herschel Small and others—stories of Alaska, the War, the South Seas, the jungle, Asia Minor, the Navy, South America, the frontier, Japan, the West, Morocco, the high seas, the Philippines, the Spanish Main, cowboys, pirates, soldiers, Indians, sailors—of adventurers the world around.

The man who saved her from a vicious scandal

A POOR farmer with no education—yet *Aline* gladly married him to escape the tongues of the scandal-mongers—*Aline* who formerly associated with the best families in her town. Will *Aline*, the innocent victim of a jealous woman, be able to stand the hard life on the farm? When her husband offers her her freedom, will she take it? Read this very human story, "The Log," by Edwina MacDonald in

Everybody's
Magazine
for January

Stories by

ARTHUR B. REEVE
EUGENE CUNNINGHAM
WILLIAM ASHLEY ANDERSON
J. T. McINTYRE
ELIZABETH DEJEANS
FRANCIS LYNDE

All in Everybody's Magazine *for* January

1st in fiction

ON EVERY NEWS-STAND—EVERY MONTH